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LOVE FOR HOLY CHURCH

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LOVE FOR HOLY CHURCH.

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LOVE
FOR
HOLY CHURCH.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

M. L'ABBÉ PETIT.

BY

EDWARD CASWALL,

PRIEST OF THE BIRMINGHAM ORATORY.

“ Multo odiata, multo più amata.”

LONDON

RICHARDSON AND SON ; 26, PATERNOSTER ROW ;
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PREFACE.

The invaluable work of M. L'Abbé Petit* here presented, for the first time, to the English reader, is but one of a large number which the gifted Author has contributed to the religious movement in France. The idea of it, as we are informed in the original Preface, was taken from Bossuet's *Élévations sur les Mystères*; and its character cannot be better expressed, than in the terms of the Approbation given under authority of his Lordship the Archbishop of Cambrai.

“ This work, breathing in every page, sentiments of the tenderest and truest devotion to Holy Church, combines with an ardent zeal to make her known, loved, and honoured, the greatest exactness and solidity in its

* *Amour a la Sainte Église ou Élévations sur l'Eglise Catholique*, par M. L'Abbé Petit, Curé à la Rochelle. Lille. L. Lefort, Imprimeur-libraire. 1856.

doctrinal statements. The spirit of charity and wisdom that has guided the Author's pen throughout, induces a hope that, while, replete with interest and instruction for clergy and laity, his excellent book will, by divine grace, prove useful even to those who are strangers to the Fold."

In this hope the Translator fervently unites; and in conclusion he recommends for translation to those who have leisure for the task, two other works by the same Author, constituting one series with the present—*Amour à la Sainte Eucharistie*; and *Amour à la Sainte Vierge*.

Oratory, Edgbaston,

Feb. 28, 1862.

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LOVE FOR HOLY CHURCH.

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER.

O Jesus, my Saviour and my God, I can think of nothing more likely to please Thy divine heart, than devout and loving meditation on that Holy Church, which Thou hast given us for a Mother, and whose office it is to sustain and direct our steps amidst the trials of this mortal life. To know her is indeed to know Thee, so closely is she linked with Thyself, both in time and eternity. Nowhere dost Thou reveal Thyself apart from Thy Church. We behold Thee typified, predicted, expected, in company with her: and now that Thou art come and gone again, Thou still presentest Thyself to us through her instrumentality, and makest her Thy visible representative.

Without Holy Church what would avail all the treasures of religion? Without Holy Church what would avail the very Gospel itself, which depends upon her authority

alike for its authentication and interpretation; and which, apart from that authority, could no longer, as St. Augustine so vividly felt,* make any claim upon our faith? And if eternal life, as Thou, Lord, hast declared, is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent,† from whence is this sublime science to be infallibly derived except from her whom Thou hast commissioned to teach it? Yes! O my Saviour, Thy divine instructions, Thy promises, Thy gifts of grace and of glory, all come to us by and through Thy Holy Church; and I intimately feel that to her I am indebted for that life which I possess in Thee!

Thus the thought of her and the thought of Thee are inseparable; and I would wish to find my happiness in meditating alike on the riches of wisdom and knowledge which are contained in Thee, and on those which Thou hast deposited in her. It is as though I heard the Angel of the Apocalypse saying to me, as he said to the beloved disciple, "Come, and I will show thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."‡ Permitted to contemplate here on earth by the light of faith, the magnificence of the celestial Jerusalem, wherefore should I postpone this enjoyment

* *Evangelio non crederem nisi me Ecclesiæ commoveret auctoritas.*

† John xvii. 3.

‡ Apoc. xxi. 9.

to that great day of eternity which is to witness the unveiling of Thy mysteries? No: I cannot endure the delay. I desire this very hour to console myself with gazing on the beauty of her, who is full of the glory of her God—that beauty with which the Lord of life was smitten—the beauty of the King's Daughter “which is within, in golden borders, clothed round about with varieties.”* And I profoundly feel that as I gain greater knowledge of Thy Church, I shall gain also to love her more and more, to become more closely identified with her, and through her with Thee, O my God, the final object of all my affections.

It is no dry study of ecclesiastical history, or of dogmatic theology, that I here propose to myself. Rather it is a continuous prayer—an elevation of heart—a series of devout aspirations—in which my soul may be ever mounting above her own littleness, and towards Thee, O Jesus, as manifested in Thy Church. I will leave to others historical details, philosophical views, profound investigations of the countless questions, social, political, religious, connected with her “whom her enemies have assailed from her youth, but have not prevailed against her.”† To thy doctors and gifted theolo-

* Ps. xliv. 14.

† Ps. cxxviii. 1.

gians it belongs to defend her cause, and well can they do so! For me, I only aim at making her loved, by telling over to myself, by recounting to others, the marvels of her divine constitution, the wonder-working presence of Thy grace within her, and the support which she incessantly derives from Thine unseen arm. I aim at diffusing a more intimate appreciation of all those blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon us through her, and which too often, alas, our eyes, distracted by other objects, allow to pass unnoticed. I aim at teaching her true children what it is in their power to do for so gracious a mother; what services she is entitled to claim at their hands in return for her countless benefits.

Oh how happy should I be, could I but bring home to a few devout hearts a sense of the special benediction which God has in store for those, who have perfectly fulfilled their duties to Holy Church; who have known, loved, served, and defended her with all the ardour of filial piety! Surely it is to such, if any, that those inspired words apply, "He that honoureth his Mother is as one that layeth up a treasure!"*

* Ecclesiasticus iii. 5.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND TITLES OF THE CHURCH.

MEDITATION I.

The Church constituted after the type of, and in union with, the Blessed Trinity.

Holy Church, is the Society of the Saints; and Thou, O Lord, art the Saint of Saints.* I must needs then ascend in thought up to Thee if I would discover the archetype of that divine society of which Thou art the sovereign source. In eternity alone are to be traced the foundations of that august edifice, which has nothing to compare with it on earth, and whose builder is none other than Thyself.

With trembling then I turn mine eyes towards the inaccessible abyss of light which Thou inhabitest, and whither mortal glance by its own natural powers could never penetrate. No gaze of indiscreet curiosity would I cast into that dazzling profundity. Were it so, I should deserve to be "overwhelmed by thy glory."† I desire to search it with the eye of faith—of that humble submissive faith, to which Thou hast unveiled so many

* Dan. ix. 24.

† Prov. xxv. 27.

things beyond the reach of human sense. Faith and faith alone can unfold to me those impenetrable Sanctuaries, tempering at the same time the blaze of Thy splendours, that I may be able, O Sun of justice, to see Thee and live.

Thou art then one sole God; such is the declaration of both reason and faith; but in the unity of Thine essence we are taught to confess three distinct Persons. What an adorable Society is here! What a divine fellowship of Three in One! And how veritably in this sublime Trinity in Unity, may we recognise the archetypal pattern after which Holy Church, the Society of the Saints, has received its predestined form! Witness our Lord's own words, in that profoundly touching prayer at His Last Supper, where He represents the Holy Trinity as the figure of that union which was to link together the members of the Church—"that they may be one," He says, "as we also are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."*

Let us not, then, search elsewhere for the primal idea of the Church. There it lies, all complete, in the bosom of God! and the divine artificer needed but a glance at Himself, to behold within Him the pattern of that work which had been in His counsels, for our sake, from all eternity. Yes! in the Church of God there has been reproduced, so to say, in antitype, the wonders of the ineffable Trinity. Consider, for instance, some of its distinguishing marks. It is holy;

* John xvii. 22.

but so, too, are the faithful called to holiness,—“According to Him who is holy, that hath called you, be you also holy in all conversation; for it is written, You shall be holy because I am holy.”* It is perfect; but so also are the faithful invited to perfection—“Be ye perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect.”† It is eternally happy in the contemplation of its own adorable blessedness; so, too, Holy Church finds her happiness in the contemplation of that same blessedness; and this happiness, destined to obtain its full accomplishment in heaven, is her highest felicity even on earth. Again, from an unspeakable self-contemplation, the perfect and substantial image of the Father is reproduced eternally in the Son. So, too, the faithful are exhorted to conform themselves to the divine likeness. “Be ye imitators of God as most dear children.”‡ “Whom He foreknew He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son.”§ Finally, in the Holy Trinity all is love; and the Holy Ghost, proceeding eternally from the Father and the Son, is that substantial and infinite love which unites them both in one. In like manner love is the very life of the Church; and the faithful are urged, as the indispensable condition of their salvation, to cherish in themselves and sustain in others this fire of divine charity.

Thus, it appears, that as man was created at first in the image and likeness of God, so, too,

* I. Peter i. 15.

† Matt. v. 48.

‡ Eph. v. 1.

§ Rom. viii. 29.

Holy Church has been constituted after the same sublime type, in a still more excellent manner. The exceeding love of our God, however, has even gone beyond this, in our favour, and in a manner that appeals to our tenderest sentiments of gratitude.

Not only is the Holy Trinity the archetypal pattern of the Church. It has condescended also to enter into union with her, to become her fountain-head, the first link of that chain, which, traversing all times, only finds its term in the eternity out of which it issued.

But what am I saying? Is there not an appearance of blasphemy in thus placing side by side finite with Infinite? Can I have forgotten the interval that separates Entity from non-existence—totality from nothingness—the Creator from His creature? That the Church should come from God, it may be argued, is conceivable enough, is even necessary, since all that is comes from Him: but that He should enter into union with the Church, that He should condescend to become, so to say, a constituent element of it, that the infinitely great God should ally Himself with the poor miserable dust which His divine breath has vivified, is it not too audacious a thought? is it not assigning to man far too lofty a position in the universe, and an ignoring of his real state? No, O my God! I forget not what Thou art, nor what we are. I recognise the infinite distance that sunders Thee from Thy creation. But suffer me to say that this distance, all infinite as it is, has been spanned,

that this abyss has been filled up, by the incarnation of Thy Divine Son. Thanks to this great "Mediator of God and men,"* our extreme baseness dares to approach Thy sovereign Majesty. Uniting two natures, divine and human, in His sole Person, Jesus, who as God, is second of the incomprehensible Trine, as man becomes one of ourselves. O august alliance! whereby man, regenerated in baptism, and "made partaker," by sanctifying grace, "of the divine nature,"† has fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, through the Holy Ghost!

What priceless favours hast Thou then lavished upon us, O my God, in constituting Thy Church! And with what nobility of thought, of feeling, of conduct, ought I to walk before Thee, enjoying, as I do, the ineffable happiness of being linked to Thee by such close ties, and of being incorporated in that mystical body of which Thy Divine Son Himself is the adorable Head,‡ and which, as such has been the object of Thy predilection through all eternity!

* 1 Tim. ii 5.

† 2 Peter i. 4.

‡ Eph. iv. 15.

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Angels a constituent portion of the Church.

Pursuing the consideration of that exalted dignity to which we have been raised in Christ Jesus, as members of His Church, let us now cast a glance at those, our first-born brethren, the holy angels, to whom we are inferior indeed here below, but with whom, agreeably to the Gospel promises, we look to be equal in the skies.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, represents our Lord as “the Head of all principality and power,”* thus including the heavenly hierarchies in that great family over which as man He is Chief. Still more expressly the same Apostle elsewhere speaks of God, “the Father of glory,” as setting Christ “on his right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality, and power, and virtue, and dominion;”† and concludes “He hath put all things under his feet, and hath made Him head over all the Church.”

The Church then comprehends within it the holy angels. Not that they have been redeemed, like ourselves, by the Blood of Christ; but because our divine Lord, in virtue of His passion and death, has merited, in His human nature, to be the head of angels no less than of men.

Among the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church there is none who surpasses the great

* Coloss ii. 10.

† Eph. i. 21.

Augustine in the delight with which he dwells upon this inspiring truth—this truth so honourable to us who are thus made co-heirs with the citizens on high; and at the same time so glorious for the angels themselves as giving them God Himself for their Head. His *Civitas Dei* abounds in passages maintaining and illustrating the fraternal union of Angels and Saints in one holy family under Him who is at once the “Father of Spirits”* and of us. Speaking, for instance, of the two Cities, which, according to him, divide mankind between them—the City of God on the one hand, comprising the true adorers of the Most High; on the other the City of the world and its vanities—the holy Doctor places the Angels in the first. “They constitute,” he says, “the principal portion of this City, and the happiest, as having never known the pains and perils of our earthly pilgrimage.” † And again, “I would begin by speaking of the holy angels, and showing, so far as I am able, how just and reasonable it is to regard them as forming one society with ourselves; so that there are not four cities but two only, one comprehending good angels and the just, the other the lost angels and the reprobate.” ‡ Once more, “Snatched from the powers of darkness and translated by God into the kingdom of His well beloved Son, we already begin to take our place in the society of the angels, with whom we shall fully share one day the delights of that

* Heb. xii. 9.

† Civ. Dei. Lib. ii. 9.

‡ Id. Lib. xli. 1.

holy and ineffable City of God, which has been the subject of this work.”*

Observe how precisely the saintly Doctor speaks to our point; in which beyond a doubt he is not merely giving his own opinion, but is recording at the same time the perpetual tradition of the faithful.

With this view of the holy Angels, we shall no longer wonder at the interest which they are described as taking in all that regards the Church—at their having so much at heart the increase of the just who are its brightest jewels and true glory—at their bearing part in its history,—at their sympathising in its joys, its sorrows, its persecutions, its triumphs,—to all which holy Scripture bears evidence, but especially that marvellous Apocalypse, in which the Holy Ghost portrays to us the course of Christianity from the beginning to the end.

Neither again shall we be astonished at the ardour with which the holy angels are described as gazing upon the “spectacle”† of God’s mysterious dealings with His Church, when we reflect that these sublime spirits, already so illuminated, derive from this contemplation an ever increasing comprehension of the divine power and goodness. Be not offended, O most pure Intelligences, at my thus speaking; for does not St. Paul himself write to the Ephesians, “To me, the least of all the saints, is given this grace to preach among the

* Civ. Del. Lib. xxii. 29.

† I. Cor. iv. 9.

Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places through the Church.”* Not that we are to regard the angels as directly receiving any new truths from the Church on earth, in the same manner in which she has enlightened “the nations that sat in darkness and the shadow of death.”† No. For as the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist, so the lowest of these celestial beings surpasses in knowledge the wisest of the children of men, not even apostles excepted. It becomes not us poor pilgrims to dream of being teachers to those who enjoy the living beams of that land which is our future home, and who behold in the divine essence all that God may please to make known to them. Nevertheless it is still true that by occasion of the institution of the Church and of its gradual development they have received and yet receive enlightenment “in the dispensation of the mystery which hath been hidden from eternity in God who created all things.” ‡

When an architect is entrusted with the construction of some magnificent palace, he commences by forming an ideal scheme of it in his own mind, invisible to all others. After awhile the edifice itself appears, and day by day as it springs into view, men perceive and admire that hidden plan, now revealing itself, not yet as a complete whole, but by a progressive develop-

2 * Eph. iii. 8.

† Matt. iv, 16.

‡ Eph. iii. 9.

ment of the bold and beautiful outline. So, too it is with you, O heavenly Hierarchies, as regards the Church. Among the treasures of the divine mercies there are secret things which surpass created intelligence—secret things which God has not revealed to you from the first, either in themselves or in His own adorable essence. Yet has He willed that later on they should come to your knowledge, even as to ours also, from the unfolding of their marvellous effects “according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret from all ages, but now made manifest according to the commandment of the eternal God.”*

It has been remarked by an eminent Doctor, that the Archangel Gabriel, when announcing to Mary the mystery of the Incarnation, employs an expression which seems to indicate that as yet he did not realize to himself the whole ultimate consequences of his sublime mission. “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save *his people* from their sins.”† His people! as though salvation were limited to the Jews! It was not till later on, perhaps, that even to that angelic intelligence the mystery was made known that “this salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles”‡ also; and that the grace of the Holy Ghost was destined to be shed not on Jews only, but upon all mankind!

Yes! the Church is an object of dearest intellectual interest to the spiritual worlds, and so too of their deepest affections. I marvel not, therefore, at the holy angels being described as “min-

* Rom. xvi. 25

† Matt. i. 21.

‡ Acts xxviii. 28.

istering spirits sent to minister for those who shall receive the inheritance of salvation"*—at their encompassing us with such tender solitudes—at their guiding us in our path heavenwards—sheltering us in their arms from the countless snares of the world—mourning over the disorders of sinners, and taking so large a share in their conversion, that our Saviour declares "there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."†

Let us love, then, these blessed spirits with the love due to brethren and fellow citizens. Why treat them as strangers? Why not approach oftener than we do, in mind and heart, "to Mount Sion, and to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels,"‡ amongst whom we may already place ourselves in hope, "waiting for the adoption of the sons of God."§ Why not be more earnest in invoking them to aid us in reaching that blessed end of our labours, which is already theirs in perfection? And why show ourselves so unthankful for the succours which they have so often lavished on our infirmity? If in return for assistance rendered during a journey of but a few days to the youthful Tobias, his devout family exhibited such lively gratitude to the angel Raphael, what ought not ours to be towards those tender guardians who direct and

* Heb. i. 14.

† Luke xv. 7.

‡ Heb. xii. 22.

§ Rom. viii. 23.

sustain us through a whole life of pain and peril, in order that at last we may enjoy with them the mansion of their and our God, and "be inebriated with the fulness of its delights for ever?"*

THIRD MEDITATION.

*The just of all times a constituent portion of
the Church.*

Let us turn now to a consideration of the Church in its earlier stage. And since, through the merits of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, there has ever been a congregation of the just here below, we are thus led back to the very dawn of our race.

I know indeed that, viewed under the aspect in which it is now presented to us, the Church goes back no further than to the time of our Lord. His grave is, so to say, its cradle. This is that Holy Catholic Church, whose glorious titles, whose benefits and claims upon our love, we shall examine later on. But before we proceed to consider the Church under this its last and perfect development, its previous existence during the ages that preceded the Incarnation, demands our loving contemplation.

When the Christian people first made their appearance in the world, they did not give them-

* Ps. xxxv. 9.

selves out as a body absolutely new, and without an antecedent history. "It is true," they argued, "the name by which we are distinguished is a new one; but our rule of life is identical with that which was pursued by the just in times past, who under another law strove to please God, and succeeded in so doing. Our obedience to Jesus, our lawgiver, what other aim has it but the practice of religion, of justice, of patience, chastity, fortitude, and the other virtues? But such too was the one object and aim of the saints under the elder covenants. Between them and us, therefore, there exists an intimate connection, and in God's sight we constitute one and the same family."

If you refer to the holy Fathers you find them universally expressing this sentiment. "The Church has existed," observes St. Augustin, "ever since the just have been upon earth; for what is the Church but the assembly of the just?" And St. Gregory the Great, commenting upon the parable of the workmen hired into the vineyard at different hours of the day, says that the vineyard is the Church, and that all the just from Abel to the last of the elect are its branches and fruit.*

Yes! O my God, these just of all ages indubitably belong to us; for neither could they, any more than ourselves, have been saved except by faith in Thy divine Son Jesus our Lord; inasmuch as "there is no other name under Heaven

* Hom. 19, in Evang.

given to men whereby we must be saved;”* and “as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.”† Yes! they belong to us, and we to them. With us they form one spiritual family, since they possessed in substance the same rule of life, the same belief as ourselves, and were united with their Redeemer to come, even as we with the same Redeemer now come and gone again. Times have changed, but obedience remains the same. What in their day was a matter of promise and expectation, has long since been bestowed; but Faith has never varied; it has but unfolded itself; and, as St. Augustin observes, “salvation has ever had to draw from the same wells.” Yes! these just of the old law are ours, and we are theirs; for they practised by anticipation the virtues of Christianity; witness the trustful confidence of Abraham; the innocence of Isaac; the filial piety of Joseph; in Moses the contempt of worldly goods; in the Prophets the spirit of martyrdom; in all, that life of faith so beautifully eulogized in the Epistle to the Hebrews.‡ Most evident it is that they were the sons of that Heavenly Father who hath begotten us also. Their characters exhibit His impress. Their actions were wrought under the influence of that same grace which has been merited for us, as for them, by our Lord Jesus Christ; and they drank of that same Spirit§ who is our life now. Nothing was wanting in order to their forming a part of

* Acts. iv. 12.

† 1 Cor. xv. 22.

‡ Heb. xi. 1.

§ 1 Cor. xii. 13.

that holy society now designated as the Catholic Church (for baptism had not as yet become necessary); and I am bound to acknowledge in them, my elder brethren, the earliest "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."*

Oh what delight thrills my soul, as I muse over the lives and virtues of these holy Patriarchs! How I love to behold them, partaking beforehand, although less abundantly, in those blessings which I possess in their full reality; "saluting the promises from afar," as the Apostle expresses it,† and exulting in the hope of that day which was the object of their desires, but was destined to dawn in its fulness upon ourselves! How I love to reckon their merits as my own, in virtue of the family tie that links us in one; to participate in their intercessions, and to unite myself with them in the worship of that God to whom they rendered so pure a homage! True it is, the just now living on earth, together with the countless saints who, since the Gospel times, have passed into the heavens, offer a sufficient support to my weakness, and constitute for me a widespread and glorious Communion. But I would wish to enjoy the whole of my blessedness; and by taking into my account the ages that preceded Christ's coming, I seem to gain additional strength, and to multiply my spiritual resources. These men, of whom the world was not worthy,‡—these men, to whom the Holy Scriptures give such illustrious titles, constitute a cloud of witnesses,"§

* Rom. viii. 17.

† Heb. xi. 13.

‡ Heb. xi. 38.

§ Heb. xii. 1.

all testifying in favour of that Faith which I have received, and of that hope which lies nearest to my heart. They will assist me by their prayers in pursuing the path which they have trod before. I will invoke them frequently. I will ask from each of them that virtue for which he was most distinguished. "My father! my father!" I will exclaim, "the chariot of Israel, and the guider thereof!"* Thou whose prayer is a rampart and whole army to the people of God, support, sustain thy child who cries to thee. Be a chariot to bear him safe heavenward, and a guide to direct him on his way.

Yes! I desire and I firmly resolve from this time, to realize more fully in my daily life my communion with the Church of old. The true Catholic spirit embraces all places and all times; and to every one of the Faithful it belongs of right to say with David, "I am a partaker with all them that fear thee, and keep thy commandments."†

FOURTH MEDITATION.

The Church Universal begins in Abel

A question here occurs upon which I would desire briefly to touch.

The Church, viewed as the universal society of

* iv Kings xlii. 14.

† Ps. cxviii. 63.

the just, begins, as we have seen, with the earliest history of man. It is my joy to feel that so it is. But here I ask myself, to whom among all the just may we conceive to belong the eminent dignity of being first in this spiritual genealogy? For the fountain-head of our earthly existence we must go back to Adam; was it given to Adam also to begin the society of the saints? At first one would feel inclined to reply in the affirmative, and with some show of reason. That faith which Adam possessed before his fall still remained with him after it; and his rigorous life-long penance, after eternal Wisdom had "brought him out of his sin,"* might seem to have restored him his claim to be viewed as our first spiritual ancestor.

But no. He in whom we all died, must not inscribe his name at the head of the just. A prerogative so high demands one who had never "stained his glory;" † and the holy Fathers agree in designating Abel as first in the long line of the saints. "This blessed City," says St. Augustin, speaking of the Church, "originates in Abel, as the city of the wicked in Cain." ‡

Abel, we must remember, is distinguished in Holy Scripture as the first to honour God by sacrifices of Blood, opening thus a new access to the divine favours. "The Lord," we read in Genesis, "had respect to Abel and to his offerings." § And, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice exceed-

* Wisd. x. 2.

† Ecclus. xlvii. 22.

‡ In Psalm cxlii.

§ Gen. iv. 4.

ing that of Cain, by which he obtained a testimony that he was just; God giving testimony to his gifts."* So, too, again, Abel is distinguished above other Saints of the Old Testament by shedding his blood in the cause of religion, and by perseverance to the end in the holy state of chastity. Priesthood—Martyrdom—Virginity—all these three are thus seen to unite, as a holy Doctor has remarked, in crowning this blessed Saint with glory, and making him the perfect image of that divine Redeemer who was to appear later on in the world's history. Magnificent and sublime destiny! To be the first progenitor of the saints—the head of the predestinate—the first fruits of sanctity on earth—as our Lord Himself would seem to indicate where He traces the sufferings of His elect “from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zacharias who was killed between the temple and the altar.” †

Let us cherish a special devotion to Holy Abel. Holy Church seems to invite us to it, blending as she does his name and memorial with some of the most solemn moments of our life. Every time Mass is said, immediately after the Consecration, the Blessed remembrance of Abel and his accepted offering is pleaded before God; and again, when the Christian in his last agony is solemnly exhorted by the Church to offer up the sacrifice of his life in full resignation to the divine will, the name of Abel recurs in the Litany at the head of those few chosen saints, whom she invokes at that awful moment. O my soul, let not this tender

* Heb. xi. 4.

† Matt. xxiii. 35.

regard for blessed Abel, thus exhibited by thy holy Mother the Church, be lost sight of by thee. Learn, in the school of this lovely Saint, the science of self-sacrifice: so shall God "accept thine offering even as he accepted that of just Abel his servant." *

FIFTH MEDITATION.

Superiority of our privileges to those of the ages before Christ.

The Church being designed to supply a home to the children of God, and be their support and safeguard through life's pilgrimage on their way to the better land, reason was there, O my God, that this Thy holy society should commence with the dawn of our race, and exist through all ages. I marvel not at this. I know that Thy bountifulness could never deny this aid to Thy elect, and that Thy elect can never fail from off the earth.

But what a difference between the spiritual privileges of that old time, and our own day! and how happy are we in belonging to an era in which the constitution of the Church offers such peculiar advantages. True it is, the ages that preceded our Lord's birth were not without their gifts of grace; but grace superabounds in those which

* Liturg.

have followed. This is a consideration which should augment my gratitude to Divine Providence, and with my gratitude, that love which is its natural fruit. Yet it is a thought which rarely occurs to the generality of Christians. Let me dwell upon it.

Come, then, O my soul, and consider well the great privileges which thou enjoyest, and their superiority over those which fell to the Saints of ancient days. The faith of those children of God, as we have already observed, differed not from ours; and this it is that makes them members of the same spiritual family with us. But even under this point of view, how much greater are our advantages than theirs! That Saviour, in whom they believed, and whom they so ardently desired, how little was He known to them! and through what mists of obscurity was the divine vision of Him revealed to their gaze! Obscurities, indeed, there must ever be here below, nor will the last veil of mystery drop, till we see our heavenly country in the clear light of the eternal dawn. But at least the veil that hung over our Lord in the old time, exists not for us, and we have a knowledge of Him unimagined by our fathers in the faith. "The mystery of Christ," observes St. Paul, "was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy Apostles in the Spirit,"* and through them to the mass of the faithful. Oh what felicity! to possess the means of knowing Jesus so fully, so far more fully than even the most profoundly inspired of

* Eph. iii. 4.

the ancient Patriarchs! Had I been born in the days of Isaac, or Jeremias, and enjoyed the teaching of those mighty Saints of old time, they could not have thrown a light upon the verities of the Faith, comparable with that which I can now obtain, in astonishing completeness of detail, from the Catholic Pastor of the obscurest hamlet in Christendom!

Is it wonderful, after this, that the number of the saved should be so inestimably greater now than it was of yore? In those days the Church did but pick up, so to say, here and there a few cast-aways, to transport to the eternal shores. It was a time when God, by a terrible judgment, but which could not but be just, suffered the nations to walk "in their own ways,"* of error and idolatry—a time "of ignorance"† to all but the children of Jacob, who alone were in possession of the divine oracles and promises—a time when God was hardly known save in Judea.‡ And oh, how rarely then was salvation to be found on the earth, delivered over, as it was, to shameful disorders and gross superstitions! Doubtless, as St. Augustine observes with his habitual caution,§ even then, amidst the idolatrous nations, there were those, it may reasonably be believed, to whom the mystery of Christ was made known, and who found in this knowledge their eternal salvation. But how much easier is it now-a-days to implant the germ of faith in the heart, and to bring it to maturity!

* Acts xiv. 15.

† Acts xvii. 30.

‡ Ps. lxxv. 1.

§ Civ. Dei. lib. xviii. 47.

Under the law of nature the human mind could discover and recognise the existence of a divine Being. Under the law of Moses it could, though with difficulty, rise to a belief in His unity. But the knowledge of the all-blessed Trinity was reserved for the law of grace, and pertains to the rich inheritance of our own happy times!

Looking again to the instrumentalities by which saving grace is conveyed to the soul, the comparison is here also entirely to our advantage. What else were the sacraments of the old law but "weak and poor elements,"* incapable in themselves of effecting justification? Ours, on the other hand, provided they meet with no obstacle in the recipient, always operate what they signify, and diffuse the treasures of saving grace with a prodigality truly marvellous.

Never then, O my God, can I thank Thee enough, for having placed me not under the mere natural law as in the case of Job and others of old time; not under the synagogue, as in the case of the Israelites; but in the bosom of Thy Holy Catholic Church, where the means of salvation are so incomparably multiplied

When the inheritor of a rich domain chances to meet some child of poverty, who with difficulty can find his morsel of bread, how happy he thinks his lot in comparison! and how he blesses heaven for its bountifulness towards him! And I, O my God, when I read the Old Testament history, replete with pictures, lovely, indeed, but far short of Gospel perfection—when I study the lives of

* Gal. iv. 9.

the just of old, so favoured by Thee in various ways, yet whose highest spiritual riches were but poverty compared with our condition, in whom God "hath shown the riches of his glory,"* and on whom He has lavished "the unsearchable treasures of Christ"†—how can I but experience, in the contrast between my state and theirs, vivid sentiments of the most boundless gratitude! Oh how gracious art Thou, Lord, in bestowing on me so rich a portion! How guilty shall I be if I turn not these benefits to account; if in the midst of such overflowing light I neglect those divine truths which ought to be the rule of my life, and are capable of raising it to a far higher perfection than was attainable under the old covenants!

SIXTH MEDITATION.

Divine Founder of the Church Catholic.

I come now, O my God, to consider Thy Holy Church no longer as the universal society of the just, but in that new and more perfect development which it has received from Thee in the fulness of times;‡ such as we now behold it, under the government of one supreme Pontiff, whose seat is at Rome; and of innumerable others pastors

* Rom. ix. 23.

† Eph. iii. 8.

‡ Gal. iv. 4.

throughout the world who, subject to his jurisdiction, share in the charge of this immense flock.

Whence, then, I ask myself, has come to the Church that new, priceless, and vigorous life which she now enjoys before our eyes, and in which we ourselves participate? To whom does she trace her second commencement upon this earth of ours, where now for eighteen centuries and more she has gone about doing good, and fulfilling her imperishable destinies? Thou, and Thou only, O my God, art He, who having upheld by Thy mighty arm through so many ages that first society of the just, hast willed, "last of all in these days"* to establish, after a more perfect manner, and under an organization better adapted to our necessities, that Holy Catholic Church which is the masterpiece of Thy Almighty skill. Thou alone wast sufficient for this creation of the world of the redeemed, even as Thou alone, in the beginning, didst bring out of nothing a universe into being!

It is doubtless, from his intimate conviction of this truth, that St. Paul gives to the Catholic Church that beautiful and expressive title, "The Church of God." "Take heed," he says, addressing the Bishops of Asia, "to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath placed you, as Bishops, to rule the Church of God."† Yes! Omnipotence alone could have conceived, and brought into existence, such an institution as the Holy Catholic Church. When it is a question of conducting all nations to their

* Heb. i. 1.

† Acts xx. 28.

eternal happiness along that path of sanctity which alone can lead to it, from whence can the means be supplied requisite for so vast an end except from Him in whose hands are all things? To God only it appertains "to give grace and glory;"* and so, too, His alone is the power to set up and maintain that Church in which grace superabounds on earth, and to which glory is promised on high.

But, if to God alone and His Almighty power, we must look for the origin of the Church Catholic; Our Lord as man is its veritable father and founder on earth. Witness His words to St. Peter, "Upon this rock, I will build my Church."† Or again, His charge to the Apostles, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."‡ Divine commission! in which sending them forth, even as He had been sent by His Heavenly Father, He institutes that prolific sacrament of Baptism, whereby the Church Catholic was originally brought into being, and is still continued!

Yes, O Lord Jesus, that the Church exists, is of Thee. Thou art "the Author and Finisher of the Faith."§ Thou art "the Head of the Church!"|| Thou art He who is so often represented to us in Scripture, as the mystical cornerstone, which holds together the whole spiritual fabric, and for which no other stone can supply. True it is the Prophets, and the Apostles more

* Ps. lxxxiii. 12.

† Matt. xvi. 18.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 19

§ Heb. xii. 2.

|| Eph. v. 23.

particularly, are also represented in Scripture as intimately concerned in the formation of the Church; but what a difference betwixt Thyself and them. Theirs was the high honour of labouring, near or far away, for that august temple. The Prophets, by their remote predictions, the Apostles, by their preaching and indefatigable zeal, concurred in setting up the kingdom of Christ; and they may thus in an inferior sense be regarded as the foundations of that divine building which, according to the words of St. Augustine, "is based on faith, raised aloft in hope, and completed by charity." Accordingly, St. Paul writes to the faithful, "Ye are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets."* So too the sacred Psalmist "The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains,"† meaning, as has been conjectured, the Apostles. But these foundations are very far from being the real support upon which the mighty structure depends. There is a hidden force that upholds them, and makes them what they are. Listen to the Apostle, completing the text already quoted, "Ye are built up," he says, "upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building framed together groweth into a holy temple to the Lord."‡ Herein lies the special and unapproachable dignity of our Lord as Founder of the Church. Those who support His Church are in their turn supported by Him. He is, in the language of the saintly

* Eph. ii. 20.

† Ps. lxxxvi. 1.

‡ Eph. ii. 21.

Bishop of Hippo, "the Foundation of the foundations themselves." Their strength would be nought apart from His. Such is the prerogative of God incarnate, and His alone. To none other it belongs save to the Son of the Highest, to Him "under whom," as we read in Job, "they stoop that bear up the world."*

O Jesus, I adore Thee, I love Thee. Thou art the sure foundation upon which the Church rests. Thou art the strength of that temple which Thou hast constructed of living stones, that it might be "an habitation of God in the Spirit."† And Thou art this not only to the Church in the aggregate, but to each individual who composes it, so long as he rests upon Thee in faith—"faith that worketh by charity."‡ Suffer me not, Lord, to be ever separated from Thee; "for no man can lay another foundation but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus."§ Ah! what could I find to rest upon, once removed from this basis? Not reason, with all its lights—not all the strength of human genius—not the whole armament of angelic worlds—could lend sufficient support to my infirmity. Once parted from Thee, an unfathomable abyss would open beneath my feet, and I should be for ever lost in its gulfs!

* Job. ix. 13.

† Eph. ii. 22.

‡ Gal. v. 6.

§ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

SEVENTH MEDITATION.

Name of the Church.

All is great in the Church of God, and this extends even to its name. In the original Greek* it implies a calling forth, thus intimating the providential object of the Church, namely, to be the assembly of such as are called of God. And, indeed need there must be of some divine call in order to belong to so august a society. "No man can come to me," says our Lord, "except the Father who hath sent me draw him."†

A term of far inferior import sufficed under the former covenant. The word *synagogue* then in use implies a mere gathering, and might serve to denote even an assemblage of animals. The word *Church*, on the contrary, more exalted in its meaning, and only applicable to an assemblage of intelligent beings, was better adapted to denote that spiritual society which, in contradistinction to that of the Jews, has been called by God out of all nations to the embrace of His love, and to the happiness of which it is the spring.

Inspired with this sentiment, I resolve, Lord, to love with all my heart this blessed Name of Thy Church; and never shall it be uttered in my presence without evoking a response of homage and affection from the very depths of my soul.

But since this term has, both in Holy Scrip-

* *Ecclesia.*

† *John vi. 44.*

ture and in ordinary use, a variety of applications, let me now consider it under its several meanings one by one. It is not mere curiosity that prompts me to this; rather it is the need which I feel of clearly defined ideas on the subject, and the certainty with which I look to find spiritual profit in the inquiry.

The word Church has not always been restricted to the limited sense in which it is now commonly understood. In its original meaning, as has been already observed, it denotes an assembly of men called forth for some important object—good or bad, as the case may be. Thus, the royal Psalmist, “*Odium ecclesiam malignantium*, I have hated the Church of the malignant.”* So, too, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find it employed to designate various popular assemblages, peaceful or otherwise.

Passing now to its ecclesiastical senses, sometimes under the term Church we comprehend all that immense spiritual society, which consists not only of the faithful now militant on earth, but also of the angelic hierarchies, of the saints in glory, and of the holy souls in purgatory. It is in this the most comprehensive of its meanings, that the Apostle appears to use it, where he says of our Lord, that “God hath put all things under His feet, and hath made Him head over all the Church.” †

With another less extensive application, the word Church is occasionally used, to designate

* Ps. xxv. 5.

† Eph. i. 22.

the long succession of the just from age to age, beginning with Abel, and terminating with the end of the world. Thus understood, the Church, as we have already seen, is divided into two immense portions, one under the Old Covenants anterior to our Lord's coming, the other under the New; and although the name of Church is more especially applicable to the second half of this great family of God, yet we not rarely find it employed even in the Holy Scriptures themselves, to designate the congregation of the just under the elder dispensation. Thus, St. Stephen speaks of Moses, as, "he who was in the Church in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sina."*

Again, this appellation is often given, and with advantage, to certain portions of the Church Catholic, comprised within fixed geographical limits. Thus, we speak of the Eastern and Western Church, meaning, of course, the Catholic Church in East and West. So, too, we speak of the Churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, in reference to the famous patriarchates so named, and which played such a distinguished part in the early ages of Christianity. Nay, the term is occasionally applied even to a single diocese, as for instance, when we speak of the Church of Paris, of Milan; or, as when St. Paul writes "to the Church of God which is at Corinth."† Forms of expression such as these, consecrated as they are by ancient custom, and approved by ecclesiastical authority, I would

* Acts vii. 38.

† 1 Cor. i. 2.

desire to receive with all respect and veneration. Yet I must not allow them to betray me for a moment into forgetting, that the Church, viewed in its reality, is one vast integral unity, which this application of the term to various localities, must in no wise be understood to prejudice.

Again, it is usual to apply the term Church to those sacred buildings in which the faithful assemble for solemn worship; and thus St. Paul appears to use it on more occasions than one. For instance; "I hear that when you come together in the Church, there are divisions among you, and, in part, I believe it."* And further on in the same epistle, "Let women keep silence in the Churches."† To Catholics this use of the word must always be peculiarly dear, sanctioned as it is by immemorial custom from the earliest times.

Besides, however, all these applications of the term Church, each of them, in its own place, most appropriate, there is another more peculiarly its own, which I have reserved to the last, and in which it will be used in the course of the following pages. For the future, then, agreeably with its ordinary meaning, I shall understand by the Church that society of Christians which the Word Eternal, for us incarnate, has united in one faith and baptism, and still governs, from heaven, in His own Person; on earth, by the ministry of a Supreme Pontiff and sacred hierarchy; and which beginning at Jerusalem has since been extended

* 1 Cor. xi. 18.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

by the preaching of the apostles and their successors, to all the nations of the world ; in other words, the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Yet here too it may be well to make a distinction in order to avoid all possible misconception. Let me observe, then, that while ordinarily applied to the entire body of the faithful, both clergy and laity, the term Church is occasionally used in a still more restricted sense to designate the clergy alone, or the laity alone, as the case may be. Thus, speaking of fraternal correction, our Lord says ; “ If he will not hear them, tell the Church ; and if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican.”* Here, by Church He would seem to designate the teaching and governing authority. On the other hand when, in the Acts, we read that St. Paul and Barnabas, on arriving at Jerusalem, “ were received by the Church, and by the apostles and ancients ;”† it would seem that by “ Church ” is to be understood the laity, the clergy being expressly included under the words, “ apostles and ancients.”

So much for the name of Holy Church, a name which, after those of Jesus and Mary, shall ever be nearest to my heart. The patriarchs of old were accustomed to give their children significant appellations, which, recalling as they did, some great benefit of God, served as a kind of living sermon and perpetual hymn of gratitude. So, too, our Lord does with regard to this holy name, which, assisted by His grace, we have been con-

* Matt. xviii. 17.

† Acts xv. 4.

sidering in its diversified meanings. He, too, has willed that His own divine society should bear an appellation which might serve to us as an enduring memorial of His overflowing mercies. Grant, Lord, that the remembrance of this blessed Name may ever hold its place in the minds of men, and may it be honoured by Thy true children and servants from generation to generation.*

EIGHTH MEDITATION.

Figures applied to the Church in Holy Scripture.

If I still linger outside the Church, and delay entering upon the contemplation of her inner glories, it is not without an object. Well indeed am I aware that her chief loveliness is interior, that loveliness which wholly absorbed the Royal Psalmist, when in vision he beheld "the King's daughter all glorious within."† But, before passing on to these considerations, there are certain exterior points which still demand my attention. Such, for instance, among others, are the various figures full of deepest import, which are so often applied to the Church in Holy Scripture.

"These things I write to thee that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the House of God, which is the Church of

* Ecclesiasticus xxxix. 13.

† Ps. xliv. 14.

the living God." * This comparison of the Church to a house built for the glory of God, is not unfrequent. The faithful themselves are the living stones of this house; charity, as the holy fathers remark, being the mystical cement which unites them in one, and imparts to the whole fabric its strength and compactness.

Oh, how often have I admired the mansions of the great, and shall I pass by with indifference this House of God, the majestic edifice of the Catholic Church, the riches of which are incomparable; and which within its vast magnificence, embraces the treasures alike of earth and heaven? If, Lord, Thou didst fill with glory† the Temple of Jerusalem, raised as it was by the hands of mortal men, and destined to become one day the prey of devouring flames; what glory, O eternal Wisdom, must Thou not have in store for that House which Thou hast Thyself built,‡ and which is destined to an eternal existence? Ah! I too would wish to learn with St. Timothy, "how to conduct myself in this House of God," § so that my life may correspond with the purity of its sacred courts, for I remember that it is written, "holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, for ever."||

In another passage, St. Paul slightly varies the metaphor. "In a great House," he says, "there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth."¶ This great House is the

* 1 Tim. iii. 15.

† Agg. ii. 8.

‡ Prov. ix. 1.

§ 1 Tim. iii. 15.

|| Ps. xcii. 5.

¶ 2 Tim. ii. 20.

Holy Catholic Church; and can I wonder that within it there should be found vessels of ignominy as well as vessels of glory, wicked members as well as good? No, I marvel not at it, nor complain that it should be so. For well I know that the malice of the wicked serves to bring out the virtues of the just; and that the worst of men are capable, by a sincere conversion, of taking their place among the vessels of glory and honour. This is one of the privileges of Thy House, O Lord: this is one of my many reasons for loving Thy Holy Church, within whose bosom never must we despair of any man's salvation.

“City of God,” is another title of the Church, which applied in the first instance by David,* has been consecrated afresh by our Lord, where He compares the Church to a city set upon a mountain.† This figure, reminding us of our citizenship in the skies, appeals to our tenderest sympathies as inheritors of a heavenly country; and I would wish that never patriot be found more attached to his native land, than I to that City of God, wherein I received my second birth in holy baptism.

Similar to this last is that other title, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” so frequent in the Parables; as also that other, “The Kingdom of God;” both full of gracious import to the true children of the Church. The kingdom, thus announced by our

* Ps. xlvi. 1.

† Matt. v. 14.

Lord is, indeed, I am well aware, not of this world;* but it has none the less value in my eyes on that account; for I know that the greatness of this world passes quickly away, and that small is the amount of happiness it can confer. And so whilst infidelity strives to dethrone the immortal Lord of this Kingdom; while the impious exclaim on every side "we will not have this man to reign over us;"† I, O my God, on the contrary, cling closer and closer, in the very depth of my heart, to Thy Church and its King; and cease not to cry out with the Psalmist, "Rule Thou in the midst of thine enemies."‡ Never shall Thy foes prevent me from doing Thee faithful service; and one day, notwithstanding all their efforts against Thee and Thy Holy Church, they shall be forced to acknowledge the truth of those words, "Sit Thou at my right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."§

Weak as the Church appears to outward view, she is, in reality, exceedingly strong even in the very midst of her infirmities. It need not, therefore, surprise us to find her compared in Holy Scripture to "an army set in array."|| This comparison will recur to our minds further on in these meditations, when we shall see her resisting the combined efforts of earth and hell, and above all, the destructive action of time, which so persistently brings to nought all that God has not created for immortality.

* John xviii. 36.

† Luke xix. 14.

‡ Ps. cix. 2.

§ Ps. cix. 1.

|| Cant. vi. 9.

But among all the figures applied to Holy Church that which I love best is St. Paul's touching metaphor "The Body of Christ." There is an inexpressible charm to me in the idea thus conveyed, of the continual influence of Jesus, as Head, over the members of the Church which is His Body, and through which, when unimpeded by sin or infidelity, His life is ever circulating in vivific streams. Oh what an honour is ours to form a part of this mystical body so dear to our Saviour, as He shows in numerous passages. Witness, amongst others, His words to St. Paul, "Saul, Saul, why dost Thou persecute me?"* — words which clearly intimate that He looks on what is done to His Church as done to Himself.

If the Church is the Body of Christ, we need not wonder that she should also be denominated His "Spouse." That intense love which Jesus has for her, as also her close union with Him, are vividly expressed by this endearing title. "I will espouse Thee to me in Faith;"† such was His promise in prophecy; and later on His beloved Apostle shows us "The Bride, the wife of the Lamb."‡ And in the Canticles we hear the Bridegroom mysteriously calling to her, "Come, my Spouse, come, thou shalt be crowned."§

Crowned she will assuredly be at last, if not here below, certainly in Heaven, and then will be applicable to her, in the fulness of its significance, a figure which already belongs to her of right:

* Acts ix. 4.

† Osee. ii. 20.

‡ Apoc. xxi. 9.

§ Cant. iv. 8.

that namely of "Queen." "The Queen stood on thy right hand," so David sings, "in gilded clothing surrounded with variety."* This prophecy, already accomplished in part before our eyes, will, hereafter, be fully realised in the sight of all the universe.

Then, too, will Holy Church be clearly manifested as the one true and only "Fold" of the good Shepherd. This, indeed, she actually is at the present moment, since nowhere outside her pale is peace and security to be found. But alas! this true fold is surrounded by enemies who steal the sheep, and detain vast numbers away from the pastures of life, where they hear not the Shepherd's voice. In that day, so longed for, sin, and heresy, and schism, will be no more; and our Lord's blessed promise will have received its last and complete fulfilment. "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one Fold and one Shepherd."†

NINTH MEDITATION.

Types of the Church.

Let us continue our search into the Holy Scriptures: even where we should least expect it they discover to us abundance of matter, bearing on our present subject.

* Ps. xliv. 10.

† John x. 16.

Such, for instance are the various types of the Old Testament ; those events, persons, objects, of an earlier age, which, while having an actual existence, were, at the same time, divinely ordained as prefigurative of better things to come. Many of these types refer to Holy Church. I will consider them. I will view them attentively. I will recognise in them the hand of Him who moulds all things to His good pleasure, and can employ them as He wills.

First, historically, among the types of the Church is the terrestrial Paradise. "The four great rivers which watered the garden of Eden," observes St. Augustine, "descended, doubtless, in their course through various other regions, but in Paradise alone was happiness to be found. So with the preaching of God's word. It may, indeed, be found, in its measure, outside the Catholic Church, but it is only within her bosom that it conveys the gifts of life to the soul."* Let heretics and schismatics boast as they please, of their imagined spiritual wealth. The true riches of God are to be discovered solely within the Catholic Church. There it is that the four Gospels flow in four beautiful rivers of salvation. There I may hold converse with countless Saints who fill that garden of delights like trees fair to behold.† There, above all, I meet Jesus, the Saint of Saints, that eternal Wisdom, who is "a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and

* Lib. iv. Contra Donat.

† Gen. ii. 9.

he that shall retain her is blessed."* Oh may those lovely courts be my sole paradise on earth!

The Church is a mother—the mother of all those who are called to a divine life; and in this point of view, our first mother Eve, that mother of all the living, is a type of her. Both alike, by a mysterious birth, came forth from the side of their spouse: Eve from that of Adam, as he lay asleep in a divine ecstasy; the Church from the side of our Lord, which opened by the cruel spear, as He hung upon the cross, sent forth blood and water, the sources of our spiritual life. But we must beware of following out this type too far. Eve gave us life only to give us death later on. The Church, on the contrary, our true mother, is never wanting in her efforts to sustain in us that life which we derive from her, and which is our pledge of immortality.

Another type of Holy Church is the ark, "wherein a few, that is eight souls, were saved by water."† In this ship of the elect, riding so tranquilly over the raging floods that had overwhelmed a guilty world, I discern a conspicuous figure of that divine society, outside of which is no salvation; and with which, if we would escape eternal death, we must be united either by visible and recognized ties, or at least by a connection which, though unseen by men, is real in the divine sight. I adore in this profound mystery, O my God, Thy eternal decrees; and well assured that there can be no injustice in Thee, and that the strictness of Thy law is perfect equity, I believe

* Prov. iii. 18.

† 1 Peter iii. 20.

and profess, that as all perished in the flood who were not inside the ark, so now all are lost for ever, who are not included in the Holy Catholic Church. Externally to this heaven-prepared refuge there is no safety for mortal man. We may weep for those who perish; we may strive to reach them a helping hand; but nothing shall ever induce us to forsake that blessed ark, which "Thy providence, O Father, governeth, and for which Thou hast made a way even in the sea, and a most sure path among the waves."* The fact that there are multitudes who refuse to enter it, multitudes even to whom God has not given such facilities for entering it as He has given to myself,—shall never tempt me to ignore or undervalue my own great happiness. And however high the deluge of iniquity shall mount and swell, higher still shall rise my gratitude towards that gracious power, whose hand has so mercifully drawn me out of its destroying depths.

The Law of Moses abounds in types which foreshadowed the Church, long anterior to her appearance on the stage of the world. What indeed was the whole Jewish nation but a figure of the Catholic Church; a prophetic people announcing Christ and His kingdom? Accordingly, the apostle concludes his brief summary of their history with these remarkable words—"These things were done in a figure of us."† In this its typical character indeed consists in great measure the real importance of that nation, so inconsiderable in comparison with the great empires

* Wisd. xiv. 3.

† 1 Cor. x. 6.

then flourishing in the world, yet, on the other hand, so full of interest when viewed, in the light of God's providence, as preparing the way for the Christian people.

The Temple of Jerusalem, where alone the Jews were allowed to offer sacrifice, is another figure of that Holy Catholic Church, outside of whose sacred precincts there is no acceptable offering. Where, indeed, but upon our altars, set up "in every place," is that "clean oblation" offered, "from the rising of the sun even to the going down," which the Prophet Malachias announced,* and which is nothing less than the veritable Body and Blood of our Incarnate God?

Besides the direct predictions of the Catholic Church, which we find in the Prophets, their visions supply us with various figurative types of her. Such, for instance, is that Stone which Daniel sees cut out of a mountain without hands, breaking in pieces the statue emblematic of the four great empires, becoming a great mountain, and filling the whole earth.† Here, at the first glance, I discern that Church which, unaided, save by the Most High, detached itself from the Jewish nation, and, by the simple preaching of the Apostles, increased to such vast proportions that it might truly be said to fill the world, there being no part of the earth, to which its preaching has not already reached, or at least shall not reach in its predestined time, according to our Lord's own words, that "unto all nations the Gospel must first

* Malach. i. 11.

† Dan. ii. 34.

be preached.”* Here, indeed, is a work which the Lord hath done, and it is wonderful in our eyes. †

Let us open the Holy Gospels. There, too, besides all the direct teaching on the subject, we meet with numerous types of Holy Church. Those mysterious draughts of fish, for instance, the one before, the other after the Resurrection, prefigure the multitudinous gathering in of souls into the vast net of the Church. So, again, that vesture without seam, which the soldiers would not divide in parts, but “cast lots for it whose it should be,” ‡ is regarded by all the Fathers, without exception, as a type of the Church in its indivisible unity.

In like manner, of our Lord's Parables in general it may be remarked, that they are typical of the Church and its future history through all time.

I know that it is possible to dwell too exclusively on the figurative view of religion. I know that writers are not wanting, who, if they might, would reduce the whole of Christianity to a mere emblematic system. But I know also, that the true children of God have in all ages held in highest esteem the study of the sacred types; and that the great doctors of the Church abound in allusions to them. Why should not I also turn them to my profit, as regards Holy Church? That my mother lives is no reason why her early likeness should not be precious to me. A good

* Mark xiii. 10.

† Matt. xxi. 42.

‡ John xix. 24.

son finds a value in all that pertains to his mother. Well, then, my mother is the Catholic Church. She lives. I see her before me. But, shall I not also value those sacred delineations of her which the hand of God traced so many ages back, and gave to the just of old to console them through the long delay of their hopes?

A mighty king betroths his daughter to a prince in a distant land, and to satisfy his impatience sends him her portrait set in jewels and gold, which the prince receives with grateful delight. After a time she herself arrives; but the happiness which her presence brings will not render the prince disdainful of the inanimate type in which he beheld her for the first time, and in which he will for ever love to decypher her image.

TENTH MEDITATION.

The Body and Soul of the Church.

What means, it may be asked, this strange expression? Is it intended to imply that as in man there are two elements—a visible and an invisible, so, too, in the Catholic Church? Yes! without wishing to carry the analogy too far, I can easily see that such a resemblance really exists. There is in the Catholic Church that which meets the senses and may be regarded as its body—the exterior association, namely, of the faithful; and there is in it also that which lies beyond the reach

of sense, and which may be compared to the soul in man—the interior gifts, namely, of the Holy Ghost, Faith, Hope, and Charity; in one word, divine grace. This is a point upon which I feel that I ought to be clear; and I would desire, Lord, to weigh it well before Thee.

Admitting, then, that in the Catholic Church there is, in the sense just mentioned, a Body and Soul, it would follow that the Christian may and ought to have part in both equally; and again, that under circumstances, an individual might have part in only one or other of them; might belong to the body but not to the soul of the Church, or to the soul and not to the body. Enlighten me, O my God, in this distinction, of which I already divine the importance, and in which I may discover much to console me.

The just, then, who visibly profess the Catholic faith, who live in faith, who do the works of faith, ever striving to maintain themselves in a state of justification, these belong at the same time to the Body and to the Soul of the Church;—to the body, as being united to it by externally recognised ties—to the soul, because in possessing divine grace they possess that which animates the Church and is its true life. O my God! how ardently do I desire thus, and thus always, to belong to Thy Holy Catholic Church.

But suppose I were so unhappy as to lose Thy grace by mortal sin, retaining, nevertheless, the gift of faith; then, indeed, I should still belong to the body of the Church, but only after an imperfect manner, to what we have termed its soul.

I should be a member, but a member paralysed. Life would no longer circulate in my veins. What a misery would this be, O my God! Yet still not an irremediable one. On recovering Thy grace by the means which Thou hast appointed, I should again be restored to the soul of the Church as completely as when first admitted into it by baptism.

Suffer me now, Lord, to ask Thee trembling concerning the state of certain classes, whose fate deeply interests me, and whose perilous condition I cannot view without alarm.

Those poor heathen, then, on whom the light of the Gospel has never shone, and who are in the constant habit of violating the Law of nature—that only Law of which they have knowledge, and obedience to which, with the desire of baptism, would be enough to save them—those poor heathen so miserable, so guilty—do they at all belong to Thy Catholic Church? Or, again, heretics, who obstinately shut their eyes to the light, and, while suspicious of their own state, refuse to enter upon enquiries involving but little difficulty, and which would in the end bring them into the possession of the truth—what must we think of their condition before Thee?

Thou answerest me, Lord, by the consentient voice of Thy holy Doctors, that neither of these classes belong in any way either to the soul or to the body of Thy Holy Church.

“Seeing I have begun I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am but dust and ashes” * What

* Gen. xviii. 27.

must be thought, then, O my God, of infants who have received baptism, but remaining under the influence of schismatical or heretical parents, are gradually sucking in the milk of error, and becoming insensibly perverted?

Thou repliest again that these Christian children, severed as they are from the body of the Church, still pertain to its soul, so long as they preserve their baptismal innocence. It is the Church, in point of fact, and the Church alone who has regenerated them whether by the ministry of Catholic, heretical, or schismatical pastors—(all the sacraments being her peculiar possession, bequeathed to her by her divine Lord)—and she alone has a right to claim these children as hers. What a happiness it is to think that as the young form a considerable part of all populations, there are consequently even in countries given over to heresy and schism, vast multitudes belonging to Holy Church, who is thus far richer in souls than is commonly imagined by those who have never considered the subject in this point of view!

My God, I thank Thee for bringing this to my knowledge, and, I beseech Thee, be not angry if I speak yet again, and ask of Thee one question more.

There is then a class of persons whose state appears to me deserving of special interest. I mean that of adults, who having been baptised and brought up in heresy or schism, have so continued in good faith without once suspecting their state, and reflecting upon the obligation of enquiring into the truth. I see clearly enough

that they form no portion of the body of the Church ; but considering their honesty of mind, their perfect readiness to follow the truth so far as they see it, and their general virtuous conduct, one would hope that they are in a state of acceptableness with Thee, and that their good faith so far excuses them, that, substantially, they belong to her in whom Thy love is centered, and out of whom is no salvation.

Thy reply, Lord, cannot be misunderstood. "Yes," Thou sayest by thy holy Doctors. "These Christians, of whatever denomination, belong to the soul of the Church, so long as they persevere in their baptismal innocence, or provided they make an act of perfect contrition, in case of falling into mortal sin after baptism. Thy Church, it is true, is not cognizant of them, and they themselves even are ignorant of their happiness ; and so, viewing them from without, we can but regard them as victims of the erroneous system which for the time holds them in its bonds. But Thou, my God—Thou, of whom it is written, "The Lord knoweth who are His" *—distinguishest them perfectly amidst the mass. Thou seest that they do not participate knowingly and voluntarily in schism or heresy ; and for Thee, if not to human eyes, they are the children of the Holy Catholic Church !

I love, I cherish this thought. It pours balm into my soul, since it permits me still to have hope for friends who are dear to me, and in whom I verily believe there exists that good faith which

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

like an unseen anchor, holds them fast to the true Church; while, to all appearance, they are sundered from her. But, as under certain conditions of society, this good faith is easily lost; and as even its presence does not supply for the deficiency of those graces which are derived from visible communion with the Catholic Church; I will always keep in mind the immense and inappreciable mercy which God has shown me, in uniting me to the Body no less than to the Soul of the Church, and in making me His child in all the force and fulness of the term.

CHAPTER II.

FOUNDATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE CHURCH.

FIRST MEDITATION.

The Jewish Dispensation a preparation for the Catholic Church.

We have seen, in a former meditation, how close a union subsists between the old and new Covenants. Let us resume the subject. It will be well to contemplate more at leisure, the conduct of that adorably condescending Providence, which, not oblivious of the world's great empires, reserved, nevertheless, for so many ages, its more extraordinary mercies, for the Jewish nation.

Not for their own sake were such favours lavished on this chosen race. Viewed apart from their connection with the great Christian people, which was to be "ingrafted"* upon them later on, their end as a nation was purely temporary. Their Law itself, divine as it was, was destined to be one day abrogated in order to give place to another covenant of wider range and influence. "The Law," says St. Paul, "brought nothing to perfec-

* Rom. xi. 17.

tion, but an introduction of a better hope by which we approach to God."*

Yet weak and unprofitable as this elder covenant was, Divine Providence encompassed it with the tenderest solitudes, just as we cherish some frail and delicate sapling, destined to become in due time a noble tree, magnificent in fruit and foliage. The Jews, insignificant as they appeared to the great heathen nations of antiquity, were nevertheless pre-ordained to be to the world its source of renovation and life; for "salvation is of the Jews;"† and, "from them, according to the flesh, is Christ, who is over all things, God blessed for ever."‡

This consideration diminishes my wonder, at the marvellous dealings of the Almighty with this people. If Thou didst impress upon them Thy divine stamp, O my God, it was to prevent them from becoming confused with other nations; it was to prepare them to serve as a grafting-stock for Thy Church, when the season should come for her to germinate, blossom, and bear fruit for the salvation of the world.

Then, too, as lawgiver and supreme head of this Thy people, Thou didst choose no ordinary man, but one formed by Thyself for so great a work. But neither the political wisdom of Moses, nor the beauty and vigour of his genius are just now in my thoughts. Other legislators, whose authority was simply human, have exhibited ex-

* Heb. vii. 19.

† John iv. 22.

‡ Rom. ix. 5.

traordinary endowments of mind and a high morality. What awes me in him is that lofty mission which he held from Thee, and which was truly supernatural and divine. I am astonished at the transcendent miracles which Thou wroughtest by his hands, to show that he spoke in Thy name, miracles in testimony of which he appealed to the entire nation. "Your eyes have seen," he says, "all the great works of the Lord, that He hath done."* I am amazed at the various prophecies verified in his own person no less than at those which he delivered himself and which were so accurately fulfilled in after ages; add to which the extraordinary virtues of this great Legislator, his piety, his disinterestedness, his extreme candour, and other remarkable gifts.

But the course of God's providence with regard to this people, thus peculiarly called to Himself, exhibits still greater wonders. He gives them laws and institutions; He makes them the heirs of His promises; He supplies them from age to age with rulers chosen by Himself, and guided by His Spirit. He enters into solemn engagements with them; and declares Himself their sole exclusive Monarch, so that they alone, of all people, could say, "Our protection is of the Lord, and our King the Holy One of Israel;"† and, again, "Over every nation He set a ruler, but Israel was made the manifest portion of God."‡ Assuredly, never hath God done in like manner, to any other nation; § and the very fury with which infidelity

• Deut. xi. 7. † Ps. lxxxviii. 19. ‡ Ecclesiasticus xvii. 14.
§ Ps. cxlvii. 20.

has in all ages striven to depreciate this people, and to dispute their high importance in the history of the world, is in itself a proof that they deserve our earnest attention. If we except the New Testament, whose excellence is supereminent and beyond compare, there is nothing on earth so full of wisdom as the code of the Jews; nothing equal in purity to their system of morals; nothing more admirable than the characters of their sainted heroes, formed by divine influences, and doctrines that came from Heaven. It is impossible for any one to escape this conclusion, who peruses with devout attention those inspired books, in which are recorded the deeds of the Jewish worthies; their words so stamped with wisdom; their thoughts so full of God; their prayers so fervent; their obedience so loving.

And yet, notwithstanding this, a dispensation thus ancient, thus excellent, thus incontestably divine, was destined to have an end. It enjoyed no promise of immortality. Never was it said to the Jews, as later on to the Church Catholic, "Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."* On the contrary, their covenant had the promise, so to say, of extinction and death. "The Lord Thy God will raise up to thee a Prophet of thy nation and of thy brethren like unto me; him thou shalt hear."† Such are the words of Moses. St. Peter, in his second discourse to the Jews,‡ and St. Stephen before his accusers,§ both apply this text to Jesus,

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† Deut. xviii. 15.

‡ Acts iii. 22.

§ Acts vii. 37.

the Adorable Author of the New Law. So, too, St. Philip, when he says to Nathaniel, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus the son of Joseph of Nazareth."* The Jews, though wrong as to the interpretation, were well aware of the fact that their prophets had repeatedly announced "that the days should come when the Lord would make a new testament with the house of Israel, and with the house of Juda, not according to the testament which He made to their fathers;"† that is to say, not a temporary one, nor one which had relation simply to this present life, but a covenant spiritual, permanent, and altogether heavenly. The whole of Jewish prophecy involved indeed a termination of the Aaronic line, and the substitution in its stead, of an eternal priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech.‡ It taught the Jews to expect the abolition of their imperfect local sacrifices, and the institution of a new and universal one, that of the Cross and the Altar.§ It taught them to prepare for becoming a new people, according to the promise made to their father Abraham, and which was to find its fulfilment in one of his seed, namely, Christ.|| And so, when at last the Gospel made its appearance in the world, the true Israelites, in whom was no guile,¶ and who had not closed their hearts to the voice of the

* John i. 45.

† Heb. viii. 9.

‡ Heb. vi. 20.

§ Mal. i. 11.

|| Gal. iii. 16.

¶ John i. 47.

Holy Ghost, withdrew themselves from the Jewish religion, not because they looked upon it as evil, for they knew that it came from God and had till then been sustained by His hand; but because, illuminated by divine light, they had discovered the Law of Moses to be the figure and adumbration of a better covenant; and felt themselves accordingly bound to forsake it, just as we quit a house which is falling to ruin, or as with increasing knowledge of a language we forsake the study of its mere grammatical elements.

History has confirmed this inspired judgment. The Jews as a people, have long since passed away. Scattered and lost among the nations they have disappeared from the scene, to give place to that great Catholic Church, whose foundation and wonderful growth is the subject of our present meditations.

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Church is founded by our Lord. His divine mission, and its proofs.

“There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise up to rule the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles hope.”* This prophecy of Isaias found its accomplishment, as St. Paul declares, † in the adorable person of our Saviour. Simul-

* Is. xl. 10.

† Rom. xv. 12.

taneously with the termination of the old covenant, Jesus comes to rekindle the hopes of mankind. He comes, not as Moses came, simply to bring in a law on the part of God, but to bring in also the grace necessary for its perfect fulfilment. Collect thyself, O my soul, plume thy wings, and mount upwards in thought as high as thou canst, for the course of our meditations is leading us to the most exalted heights of all God's compassions towards the children of men.

I open the New Testament, that divine book whose every word is truth itself, and I see at the first glance, that Jesus is there exhibited not simply as an ambassador of God like Moses, and the other prophets, but as His only-begotten Son, who, without leaving the bosom of the Father, comes from Heaven to declare Him, and to finish the work which He has given Him to do—the Redemption of man, and the foundation of Holy Church. Miracles attend upon His steps, and He appeals to them in proof of His heavenly mission. “I have,” He says, “a greater testimony than that of John, for the works which the Father hath given me to perfect—the works themselves which I do—give testimony of me, that the Father hath sent me.”* And again, “If I do not the works of my Father believe me not; but if I do, though you will not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”†

O my Jesus! I bless Thee for these divine

* John v. 36.

† John x. 37.

words. They draw my earnest attention to Thy miracles, which so eloquently bear witness to Thy divinity, and to the object of Thy coming.

Elsewhere Thou appealest to their number and magnitude. "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them"*—or again, "Wo to thee, Corozain; wo to thee Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the mighty works that have been wrought in you, they would have done penance long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes."†

And these miracles, O my Jesus, to which Thou thus constantly makest reference, even Thine enemies did not dare to deny. They were public, palpable, striking, incontestable; and they produced their intended effect, in the first instance, on the immediate witnesses of them; and next on the whole body of the first professors of the faith, who thought no sacrifice too great, in support of the doctrine thus divinely authenticated to them. This doctrine, with all its invincible proofs, is ours also; and what they maintained at the loss of property, family, life itself, we now enjoy in tranquil possession as children of the true Church. How great is my happiness, O my God, to have received from Thee a gift so ineffable, at so small a cost on my part. Oh teach me to value it as I ought!

One among our Lord's miracles there was,

6 * Matt. xi. 4.

† Luke x. 13.

transcending all the rest—His own glorious Resurrection! This single fact, established as it is, on the most unquestionable evidence, suffices of itself as the great standing proof of Christianity; and accordingly it is observable that the Apostles in their first addresses to their countrymen, almost confine themselves to it. “This Jesus,” says St. Peter, “hath God raised up again, whereof we all are witnesses,”* and elsewhere, “With great power did the Apostles give testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.”†

But in addition to miracles we have been mercifully provided with another and totally distinct proof of our Lord’s mission. Such is that long series of prophecies of which He was the sole object, and which had the effect of creating, both in Jewish and Gentile worlds a strong expectation of a coming Saviour, who should raise up our fallen nature and bring us near to God. Thus the time of His appearance on earth—His being born in Bethlehem of a pure Virgin—His dying in dreadful torments—His resurrection from the dead—His sacred functions of Prophet, Priest, and King—these and innumerable other circumstances pertaining to Him, down to their minutest details, had been committed to writing long ages before He came. So, too, as regards the establishment of the Church, His spiritual kingdom upon earth; this, too, had all been foretold, and is, indeed, to ancient prophecy an inexhaustible

* Acts ii. 32.

† Acts iv. 33.

subject of the most affecting and beautiful images.

The absolute agreement between these predictions and their corresponding events, places the divine character of our faith on a basis wholly unassailable. All that was written was fulfilled. Oh what mysterious depths are here, worthy of our profoundest study!

But if miracles and prophecy, each in their special manner, appeal to sincere and thoughtful souls with an amazing force, not less is the impression of truth borne in upon the mind, by the simple contemplation of our Lord's life as recorded in the Holy Gospels. Yes, O my Jesus, Thy poverty.—Thy self-abnegation.—Thy rejection of all the influences commonly employed by the world.—Thy incomparable virtues.—Thy zeal for the glory of God.—Thy boundless love even for Thine enemies.—Thy purity of life wholly without reproach, so that Thou alone of all men couldest challenge the world to convince Thee of sin*—all these* excellencies—so countless, so transcendent—reveal Thee to the eye of faith as that Just One so long expected, “the faithful witness,”† whose testimony is truth itself.

Powerful, however, as these proofs are, and such as these, in confirmation of the faith, I feel that there is something more powerful still; Thy divine grace, O my God, which, while illuminating the mind, predisposes also the heart to recognise in Jesus the promised Saviour of mankind. This grace it was that caused the hearts

* John viii. 46.

† Apoc. i. 5.

of the two disciples going to Emmaus to burn within them, while our Lord "beginning from Moses and all the Prophets, expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."* This it was that made the Ethiopian eunuch so facile to the voice of Philip, when taking occasion from a passage of Isaias which he was reading, he "preached to him Jesus."† This it was that so touched to the quick those multitudes of Jews, whom St. Peter converted to Christ. And this, too, at Athens, under the preaching of St. Paul, brought to the faith "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris and others with them;"‡ and at Philippi, "opened the heart of Lydia, a seller of purple, to attend to the things that were spoken by Paul."§

To this same grace of Thine, O my God, we also, the Christians of these days, are indebted, that we believe in Thee and in Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Oh may it be no less efficacious in assuring our perseverance, than it has been powerful in bringing us to Thee; and may it bind us more and more, heart and soul, to that Holy Catholic Church, through whose instrumentality the true Faith has been transmitted to us.

* Luke xxiv. 27.

† Acts viii. 35.

‡ Acts xvii. 34.

§ Acts xvi. 14.

THIRD MEDITATION.

Effusion of the Holy Ghost.

The enemies of the Church affect not to see in her history any evidence of God's peculiar providence. That constant divine interference which distinguished the Jewish theocracy, does not, it is true, so visibly manifest itself at the present day ; but the mistake were great, to argue from this that God is less near to His Church now, less zealous for its interests, than in the case of His ancient people.

O my soul, if ever thou art tempted to such a thought, let the marvellous gifts which from the Day of Pentecost till the present time God has outpoured upon the Church, be its sufficient refutation. What better proof than this can we find, of His tender Providence over her?

The Prophets had announced that in His own time God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, upon His sons and His daughters.* Our Lord promises to His apostles the same gift as near at hand. "It is expedient for you," He says, "that I go ; for, if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you ; but if I go I will send him to you."† "I send the promise of my Father upon you ; but stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high."‡ Elsewhere, He dwells

* Joel ii. 28.

† John xvi 7.

‡ Luke xxiv. 49.

upon the marvellous effects that should follow upon this gift, surpassing even His own wonderful works. "Amen, Amen, I say to you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do, He shall do also, and greater than these shall He do, because I go to the Father."*

He ascends into heaven. Ten days are allowed to pass. Then, in the form of fiery tongues descends the great Pentecostal gift. It is a remark of St. Augustine that the wondrous transformation which ensued in the Apostles—so weak and timid before, but from that time so full of light, fire, and energy—is in itself a miracle so great, as to be unaccountable on any mere human theory.

Scarcely can we realize to ourselves in these times the extent to which miraculous gifts became spread among the faithful, within a very brief period after the Day of Pentecost. In almost every epistle of St. Paul, reference is made to them; and that for some centuries later they continued to be largely diffused throughout the Church, we have the evidence of contemporaneous writers, whose judgment and truthfulness cannot be called in question. Such are St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenæus, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and others.

O my God, in this continued outpouring of miraculous gifts upon Thy Church, I recognise Thy tender solicitude in her behalf, Thy paternal care not only for the immediate recipients of these gifts, but for all who profited by their instrumen-

* John xiv. 12.

tality; for if "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit,"* that profit is not simply for himself but for "the body which is one." And as this miraculous assistance was necessary in a special manner to the primitive Church, so it does not surprise me that it was then granted more lavishly than at present. Well, however, am I aware that the Church has at no time been devoid of it. Her authentic history shows that every age of her existence has been more or less fruitful in miracles.

But passing now from miraculous gifts, to the more ordinary graces of the Holy Ghost, it is interesting, and, at the same time, most instructive, to trace in the unity of character exhibited by the Saints of Holy Church, under every variety of time and place, the continued presence of that "one same Spirit who divideth to every one according as he will."† The devout and attentive reader of Church history cannot fail of being struck by this fact. Thus, for example, what a difference in social organization, tone of thought, and general manners, between the ninth and the nineteenth century! Yet, notwithstanding this, the Saints of the earlier period exhibit a marvellous resemblance to those of modern times, and so again to those of the Gospel age. Under the early persecutions—through the darkness of barbarism—amidst the bloody conflicts of tumultuous hordes breaking in upon the old Roman empire—the true children of God exhibit the same charity, the same

* 1 Cor. xii. 7.

† 1 Cor. xii. 11.

prudence, the same identical habit of thought and language, as amidst the undisturbed tranquillity of the world's happiest periods. All things change around them; they alone remain immutable.

Yes, O my God, the human spirit left by Thee to its own workings is essentially weak and feeble, rising and sinking, advancing and retrograding, according to circumstances; whereas, on the other hand, Thy good Spirit,* ever the same, notwithstanding the contrariety of times, of customs, of dispositions—impresses on all upon whom it comes, the same heavenly stamp. True, indeed, “there are diversities of graces; for to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the grace of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy—but all these worketh one and the same Spirit.”† Amidst all that profuse variety of gifts, which makes the Church so lovely, we perceive and intimately feel that the justified have one and all “eaten of the same spiritual food, and drunk the same spiritual drink;”‡ that what Thou wast to them at the beginning of Christianity, the same Thou art still, and wilt be for ever, and in this again we recognise a proof of Thy abiding presence within Thy Church, and of the untiring love with which Thou cherishest her.

O my Jesus, I bless Thee for this, with all the

* Wisd. xii. 1.

† 1 Cor. xii. 4.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 3.

powers of my soul. When I think of it I can find no words to thank Thee, and my only resource is silence and wonder, thereby to praise Thee less unworthily.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

The rapid growth of the Church not the result of mere human effort, but of a divine influence.

Behold the Church, O my soul, as, fresh from the Day of Pentecost, she comes forth upon the world's stage. What is the force which sustains her, animates her, gives her motion, expansion, growth?

Surely it is God, and God alone. That little assembly of Apostles whom our Lord left behind Him when He ascended on high, to what did it amount? It was but a grain of mustard, according to His own parable; it was a power so insignificant in a human point of view, so little to be feared, that the world, at the sight of the Apostles taking in hand the establishment of Christ's Kingdom, might have cast at them the same insulting language which of old the rebuilders of Jerusalem heard from their enemies; "Let them build," they exclaimed, "if a fox go up, he will leap over their stone wall."*

Yet, notwithstanding this, scarce have a few years elapsed, and lo! the building has already

* 11 Esd. iv. 3.

begun to assume gigantic proportions. Already St. Paul is able to declare to the Romans that "their faith is spoken of in the whole world;"* and of himself, that "from Jerusalem roundabout as far as to Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ;"† an extent of territory comprising Arabia, Seleucia, Cyprus, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Achaia, and Epirus! Later on St. Justin, Arnobius, Tertullian, and others, in their apologies, speak in magnificent terms of the Gospel's rapid diffusion through every quarter of the then known world. Pagan writers of the highest character, such, for instance, as Suetonius, Tacitus, Seneca, Pliny, give their testimony to the same fact, and swell the Church's hymn of triumph.

Whence has all this come? Is it the result of simple human efforts? Is it from arm of flesh? as Holy Scripture expresses it. No. "It is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes."‡

The Catholic Church in point of fact, with its severe moral system, and incomprehensible dogmas, advanced, if we may so say, dead against the habits of the age, in direct opposition to the whole current of established ideas. The pagans (and nearly all the world at that time, was pagan) lifted up a cry of horror at the sight; and in proportion as the Church gained ground, clung with

* Rom. i. 8.

† Rom. xv. 19.

‡ Ps. cxvii. 23.

a passionate madness to their old religion, which was but a deification of sensualism and pride.

And to make head against this paganism, rooted for so many ages in the world's imagination, and still more deeply in its heart, the corrupt tendencies of which it flattered and even seemed to revere,—what were the visible resources of those poor fishermen and their successors? They were so slight that St. Paul speaks of them as simply to be counted for nought in the comparison. "The mean things of the world," he declares, "and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that He might destroy the things that are."*

Had they been mere barbarians against whom the battle was to be waged, the triumph of Christianity might indeed have been in some sort explicable on human grounds. But history is here at hand to testify to the high intellectual character of those times. The populations, to whom the Gospel was to be rendered acceptable, had their philosophers, their historians, their poets, their public opinion, and other influences of civilization. Greece and Rome had both combined in bringing this civilization to maturity. And when Peter, forsaking the narrow limits of his Galilean lake, entered the eternal city, to announce the good tidings of salvation, he found there a state of society, which, in its mental vigour, refinement, luxury, and unbounded worldliness, presented obstacles to all appearance insuperable.

Nevertheless, the Church triumphed, triumphed

* I. Cor. 1. 28.

with a rapidity which the greatest conquerors have never equalled. It is, indeed, marvellous to view her advancing "as a giant that rejoiceth to run his course;"* to mark the facility with which she obtained from a world so intellectualized, so sensualized, the adoption of mysteries, which at the present day come to us with all the prestige of a long tradition, but which according to the notions then current, must have been strange and deterring to the generality of men. That unity of God, reducing to nought the countless divinities of paganism! That doctrine of an Incarnation setting up as an object of worship a man born of a virgin, poor, and of no repute, yet equal with God His Father, and one with Him in nature, while distinct in Person! That Cross, the scandal of the world, and the very mention of which, according to Cicero, was unworthy of a Roman citizen, † such infamy in that day was attached to this mode of punishment!—that tenet of a Resurrection, which drew from the philosophers of Athens a smile of pity, and which Pliny numbered ‡ among the things which are impossible even to God! All these, with other mysteries not less hard to understand—the world apprehended, the world accepted, the world believed, as if by enchantment. And not only did it adopt these doctrines so new and unlooked for, but it submitted to their consequences by accepting also the moral system which they involve, opposed as it

* Ps. xviii. 6.

† *Mentio denique ipsa indigna cive Romano est. Cic. pro Rabirio.*

‡ *Nec potest Deus revocare defunctos. Plin. lib. 2, c. 7.*

was to those old voluptuary habits which custom had in a manner made law.

Meanwhile, during the period of transition, and especially at its commencement, to what difficulties did the name of Christian expose its possessor! Further on in our meditations we shall behold the blood of the martyrs flowing like water. Just now it is enough for our argument to reflect on the opprobrium and general execration which fell to the lot of those who bent their neck beneath the Gospel yoke, and in so doing came to be esteemed as "the refuse of the world, and the offscouring of all."* Surely, on natural grounds alone, men would never have been found willing to encounter such a destiny; never would have resigned the gifts of nobility, wealth, genius, and all the enjoyments of society, in exchange for a Gospel attended by such countless humiliations. Allowing for all possible eccentricities on the part of individuals, we cannot so disparage mankind in general, as to imagine them capable of such an egregious folly; for folly it would have been, to become a Christian in those days, otherwise than by Thy inspiration, O my God, and unless Thy infallible Word had guaranteed to them the truth of their belief and the certainty of their hope.

Praise be to Thee, Lord, for this evidence of a celestial origin, thus stamped upon Thy Holy Catholic Church. Assuredly, no mere human institution could have thus commenced and thus triumphed.

FIFTH MEDITATION.

Influence of the early Church on the side of virtue.

We are too apt to put out of our consideration what the real condition of the world was in point of morality, at the epoch when the Gospel appeared. Yet a glance at the literature of the time, and especially its satirical writings, is sufficient to show that society had become a very sewer of filth, without even a pretence at disguise. The works of art, still remaining to us from that period, bear, many of them, with all their exterior perfection, a stamp of such barefaced and revolting iniquity, that modesty is obliged to drop a veil over their disgusting foulness, astounded at the evidences of a profligacy, for which the Christian mind has not even the corresponding ideas.

But, apart from this dismal testimony, there are various passages in the New Testament, and especially in the Epistles of St. Paul, which sufficiently indicate the true condition of the heathen world at the dawn of Christianity. Listen, for instance, to the description of it in the Epistle to the Romans: "And as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, covetousness, wickedness; full of

envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity; whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy." * What a picture! and this of an age which boasted of its enlightenment, and possessed, in fact, numerous writers of the highest intellectual endowments!

Such, then, was the true character of those vast populations which Holy Church undertook to assault, cross in hand. Such were the cities into which the Gospel had to be introduced; that Gospel whose doctrine is humility, meekness, purity, love. And these cities, less notorious, perhaps, in iniquity than Corinth, whose debauchery had become a proverb, but in reality not a whit less profligate, did, in the result, accept this Gospel; and accepted it, as regards no inconsiderable portion of their inhabitants, so readily, so lovingly, so absolutely, that St. Paul cannot find terms to express the marvellous transformation thus effected; the innocence, chastity, sanctity, that so quickly succeeded upon a state of moral infamy and putrefaction. "Such," he says, "were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." †

Neither was this prodigy limited to the times of the apostles. After their withdrawal from the scene, the great healing of souls still continues with undiminished vigour. The Apologists of

* Rom. i. 23.

† 1. Cor. vi. 11.

the Faith in their addresses to the Pagan emperors, and others, are full of testimonies to this effect, and these not of a mere vague and general character, but entering into details; now extolling the piety of the faithful, now their universal charity, now their invincible fidelity exhibited even towards the tyrants who persecuted them; now, again, their incomparable gentleness, their purity and innocence of life, their detachment from earthly goods, their absence of human respect, ambition, and other worldly vices. The boldness with which they contrast this picture with the depravity of the times, shows that they had no fear of refutation, and regarded their facts as placed beyond all question.

O my soul, to whom but to God only, can we refer the glory of this change otherwise so inexplicable? Purely natural causes are obviously too feeble to have produced such a result; nor does history supply us with a single instance of the kind. On the contrary, experience proves beyond a doubt that individuals and nations, ever tend, of themselves, towards a lower and lower standard, in spite of all that simply human effort can do. Witness the lamentations of Philosophy, from age to age, over the inefficacy of its maxims and the little interest they inspired; witness the powerlessness which the philosophers themselves discover in their own case, who evidently regarded their systems rather as a source of profit and distinction, than as a rule of life applicable to themselves and to mankind.

And, lo, in the midst of this failure, the meek

and lowly Jesus of Nazareth comes forward to grapple with the world-wide evil, and to take in hand its cure, and this, too, without any of the materials which human prudence would have suggested. He begins with the Apostles themselves. And what argument does He employ to attract them to Him? He announces to them the cruel and shameful death which He is to die, and by which He is to triumph! Judging, humanly, this announcement of the Cross should rather have deterred than allured them. On the contrary, it succeeds! The twelve Apostles become the first conquest of Christ.

Later on the whole world becomes their conquest in turn; or rather of the Gospel which they preached. And what is the instrumentality which they employ? It is the Cross again; "to the Jews a stumblingblock, to the Gentiles foolishness."* With this, as with a shepherd's crook, St. Peter gathers together into one fold, the flock which he was commissioned to feed, and reorganizes the world; introducing into it virtues hitherto unpractised, and till then without even a name!

Between the means employed, and the conversion thus effected in innumerable souls, never will infidelity succeed in pointing out any mere natural connection. There is, in fact, no proportion here between cause and effect, and without Divine intervention such a result would have been simply unattainable.

O Holy Church of Jesus, how marvellous have

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

been thy triumphs! How can we explain them otherwise than by the power of that Almighty arm which sustains thee? Who can dare to say that there is nothing more in thee, than in the various schools of philosophy, ancient or modern? or than in the religious communions which have been formed outside thy pale? These associations may have exhibited, indeed, a certain glitter on their first appearance; for fervour and zeal of some sort usually attend upon the commencement of every movement. But the actual movers have generally been a few men of ability, whom self-love and human interests impelled, and for awhile supported. What comparison is there between the medley of conflicting elements, which such combinations present, and that immense communion of the Faithful of all nations, supported and held together through so many centuries by purely spiritual influences—the Catholic Church? On one side all is human; on the other, all is divine!

And as to the moral virtues which are attributed to the founders of certain sects, to thee it is, O Holy Church, that even these are to be referred, if indeed they truly existed. From thee did these arch-heretics borrow that wealth which they afterwards employed to gain followers and seduce the crowd. Their gifts were but the remains of the sap which they had drawn from thine ancient stock, and which still continued, after their separation, to impart for awhile a semblance of life, but gave them no power “to bring forth fruit to God.”* Thou alone, O Church of

* Rom. vii. 4.

Jesus, art “the tree of life for the healing of the nations.”* Thou alone truly comest from God, and ledest us back to Him!

SIXTH MEDITATION.

The Church, in the blood of her martyrs overcoming persecution.

Wherefore, O my God, this torrent of blood in the courts of Thy holy temple! Why must innocence and piety receive, as their earthly portion, such a fearful heritage of torments and death? “Death is not of Thy making, neither hast Thou pleasure in the destruction of the living;”† still less when they are Thy friends who perish. Wherefore, then, dost Thou permit these cruel persecutors “to pour out blood, as water,” in this new Jerusalem which Thine hands have builded?‡

I perceive the reason. It is because nothing so manifests the divine character of our faith as the constancy of the martyrs. It is because Thou desirest, Lord, to impress upon Thy work a stamp which belongs to Thee only, and which shall convince all men that the Catholic Church is exclusively Thine. I bless a thousand times Thy divine

* Apoc. xxii. 2.

† Wisd. i. 13.

‡ Ps. lxxviii. 3.

Providence for thus acting. I worship the adorable severities of Thy Majesty displayed in these chosen ones of Thy children, for the confirmation and salvation of the rest. Who can contemplate "this cloud of witnesses"* resisting unto blood, and led as sheep to the slaughter, without feeling convinced that to encounter such a fate they needed superhuman aid which could come but from Thee? No! Human nature left to itself is incapable of a constancy so sublime, so general, so sustained. Let fanaticism have the credit of its martyrs here and there. But can it show its thousands upon thousands for consecutive centuries? Can it now in the nineteenth century produce them to view, as the Church did at the close of the eighteenth; as she does still, in China, or when occasion calls, at any other point of the known world? Men do not expose themselves to torture and death from mere wantonness. In the depths of my heart there resides, as I clearly perceive, an intimate opposition to suffering. I recognise among its fundamental instincts that axiom of philosophy—"No one acts for the pleasure of being miserable." And I know that other human hearts are not so very different from my own. Ignominy, poverty, suffering, death, are no natural source of enjoyment to any of us. From whence, then, but from Heaven itself can have come that absorbing thirst for martyrdom which has possessed such countless multitudes of the Christian world?

What was their object? What gain did they

* Heb. xii. 1.

expect from such a sacrifice? To die—to die for one crucified—with no recompense in view save beyond the grave—whence came this novel idea? Whence but from our Lord's own words: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven."* Whence but from His divine grace, which enabled them to comprehend these words in the fulness of their significance—a grace abiding and perpetual, since never will persecution, never will martyrs, be wanting to the Church in some quarter or other of the globe.

And so it comes to pass that they who would have destroyed her, have disappeared successively from the scene, but she still remains in her place. Even on earth they received the punishment of their guilt in the violent deaths, which mostly carried them off by the manifest retribution of God; and now they pay their eternal penalty: but there she still stands firm as ever. The Roman Empire, that great persecutor, drunk with the blood of martyrs, has long since been ravaged, overwhelmed, obliterated; but the Catholic Church still remains, fulfilling to the letter the Prophecy of Isaias, "Behold, all that fight against thee shall be confounded and ashamed; they shall be as nothing, and the men shall perish that strive against thee; they shall be as nothing, and as a thing consumed, the men that war against thee."† Yes! The Lord exalted His hand: He smote them, and the fire of His justice devoured them;‡

* Matt. x. 32.

† Is. xli. 11.

‡ Is. xxvi. 11.

but the Bride of the Lamb still shines in undiminished glory. The sufferings of her martyrs have been the source of her triumphs, and their blood the seed of the Church. Surely the finger of the Lord is here!

SEVENTH MEDITATION.

The Church always weak, yet strong in her weakness, with the strength that comes from God.

What St. Paul says of himself is singularly applicable to Holy Church, "When I am weak then I am strong;"* strong, that is, with the strength of God, since then it is that "the power of Christ dwelleth in me."

It is not indeed too much to say that the whole history of the Catholic Church may be summed up in these words. From a distance you would pronounce her the frailest of earthly tabernacles, which the first gust of the tempest must inevitably sweep away. You draw nigh; and, lo, "a rich habitation, Jerusalem, the city of our solemnities, a pavilion that cannot be removed. Neither shall the nails thereof be taken away for ever, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken."†

She is the Vine which the Lord keeps and waters continually, guarding it night and day lest any hurt come to it, ‡—not that vine which

* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

† Is. xxxiii. 20.

‡ Is. xxvii. 3.

He brought out of Egypt, and tended so lovingly, as the Psalmist sings*—that miserable inconstant vine, which brought not forth its expected fruit; which, when its master “looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought forth wild grapes;”† and which, in His just indignation, He made desolate, commanding the clouds to rain no rain upon it, and withdrawing His gracious influences. No! but she is that other Vine, which, when the Jewish nation were rejected by Heaven for its horrible deicide, succeeded in its place; that noble Vine, whose vigour and luxuriance is not in herself, but in Him who said, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches.” ‡

And this Catholic Church, so weak in herself, so strong in her God, what a spectacle her history presents! Only now we beheld her, in the very infancy of her existence, tossed by persecution, and all but drowned in blood; but God, who enables the reed to stand before the gale that uproots the oak of centuries—God, whose providence sustains the sea-bird’s delicate nest on the foaming wave—God, who watched of old over the cradle of Israel’s lawgiver—He is faithful to His Church; He bears up in His everlasting arms that wonderful creation of His grace, so strangely destined ever to suffer, ever to be dying, ever to be rising again, to an imperishable life!

The ages of persecution found at last their term; but this peculiar destiny of the Church to

* Ps. lxxix. 9.

† Is. v. 4.

‡ John xv. 5.

suffer, did not come to an end ; it simply assumed another form. Heresies arose and essayed to make a breach in her walls. Idolatry itself, reviving for awhile through the influence of Julian the Apostate, brought to bear the whole weight of the state against a body unprotected by earthly patronage. Time, however, glided on, and the heresies went their way with those who maintained them. Idolatry itself perished in that last effort which Providence would seem to have permitted, only to show more clearly how vain is the arm of man destitute of divine aid. The Church, the object of so many attacks, remained unharmed, and held her own as before, to the extreme wonder of those, who knew not that He, who protected Israel of old, was with her also.

In their vain attempt to destroy the Church, its enemies made alliance with the philosophy and literature of the day ; and to all appearance these were a powerful auxiliary. Sarcasms, high-sounding theories, perversion of facts, insinuations, calumnies, all were employed against an institution of which honesty, simplicity, love of truth, are the predominant features. Her foes used against her without scruple whatever weapons came to hand, good or bad, fair or unfair. She, on the contrary, defended herself with but one arm alone, the truth, which she had received from God. In this delusion-loving world how feeble is naked verity against attractive sophisms presented with audacious effrontery, and adorned for the occasion with all the wit and imagination of man ! And yet, notwithstanding, this verity of

Thine, O my God, won its way, like an impetuous flood, over every obstacle.

But, perhaps, the greatest danger threatening the Church is from the false brethren within her pale, from the corruption to which her own members are liable. Will her vital force be sufficient to resist these undermining influences? On all sides, down the long course of ages, we hear the lamentations of Saints over the disorders, of which they were at once the witnesses and the victims. Heresy and schism have taken advantage of these complaints to justify their separation from a Church, which they pretended to regard as smitten with an inward malady. But these just ones who raise such mournful wailings, are themselves, O dearest Lord, a standing proof that a Church, which bears such fruits of sanctity, cannot be unworthy of Thee. Nor, unless Thy Holy Spirit were in her, should we hear, in and through them, these "unspeakable groanings"* which betray His presence.

Meanwhile, Holy Church, it is true, has never been at a loss for defenders. Writers she has ever found, often of first-rate talent, to plead her cause. But their works, alas! have seldom gained from the world the attention they deserved. Perhaps in the very character of such writings there has been something too serious for the world, something too unattractive. However it be, they have rarely attained popularity, while, on the other hand, the assailers of the Church, too often brilliantly endowed, have arrayed the passions on

their side; and by flattering its weaknesses, have gained the ears of the multitude.

Not seldom too, these very champions of the Church, have themselves added to her difficulties. Perfectly at one on all fundamental points, (for union in matters of faith pertains to the very essence of Catholicism), they have nevertheless too frequently disagreed as to the best mode of serving the cause of truth; whilst, on the contrary, their enemies, impelled by a diabolical instinct, have seemed to act as one man. What a rock of destruction would this have been on the supposition of the Church being a purely human institution! Her best defenders, isolated, thwarted, misunderstood, and thus rendering her but imperfect service! The ridicule cast upon them by zealous or self-interested brethren redounding upon her! Their influence straitened by the very men who ought to have extended it! While, on the other hand, swift and unimpeded, the arguments of infidelity fly through the world, and find a ready access to every ear. What a disproportion is this! What infirmity on the side of the Church! What strength on that of her enemies! Yet nevertheless they pass away and perish, and she abides! And time, that great agent in the interests of God and of truth, sooner or later brings round a vindication of the Church and another triumph of her cause.

As yet we have not alluded to the Civil Polity, and the connection of the Church with it. Designed by Providence to subserve the advancement of the Church, how often, on the contrary,

has the state made her its sport, and endeavoured to reduce her to a nonentity! Yet even here occasions have been, and not a few, when diplomacy and state-craft have counteracted their own designs. Unforeseen directions of events, new political combinations, the deaths of leading characters, and other circumstances not provided for, come in upon the course of history, and produce a result entirely opposite to that which politicians contemplated. Their sole object, in this or that line of action, was to use religion for their own purposes. Time passes, and they have gained, it may be, their end. But, lo! the cause of the Church has gained infinitely more. Thereupon the world cries out, What good fortune! But fortune does not remain constant for eighteen centuries; and now, for a still longer period, the Church has ever had the best of it in her contest with the great ones of the earth. "They stood up, they met together against the Lord and against His Christ."* They said, "Let us wisely oppress them;"† and their vain policy did but dash itself to pieces against the imperishable Church, obliging them again and again to appeal for help themselves to her whom they had so grievously injured.

O my God, I will repeat it, such strength in such weakness can but come from Thee and Thee alone.

And now, in conclusion, one word more for my own consolation and encouragement. If, then, I rightly comprehend, Lord, Thy adorable provi-

* Ps. ii. 2.

† Exod. i. 10.

dence, such as are Thy dealings towards the Church in general, so are they with each individual member of it. The life of the Christian is strength in weakness. Ever persecuted like Him, whose representative he is upon earth,* he is nevertheless ever sustained by God so long as he puts in God his trust. Impressed with this profound truth, I will not allow myself to be discouraged either at the power of my spiritual enemies, or at my own infirmities. And in order to keep alive this blessed confidence, let me recall to mind the advice given by a sainted writer of the early Church, to one of his friends, who had begun to experience the truth of those words, "all who will live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."†

"From the beginning of ages, Jesus suffers and conquers in all who are His. In Abel He is murdered by a brother; in Noah He is mocked by a son; He is an exile and a pilgrim in Abraham; offered for sacrifice in Isaac; condemned to cruel labours in Jacob; sold in Joseph; exposed to death in Moses; He is stoned and sawn in twain in the prophets; He is driven over land and sea in the Apostles; and is slain a thousand times over in the holy martyrs. He, too, it is who suffers in your person the opprobriums of which you are the victim. He it is whom in yourself the world detests and persecutes. But be not cast down. He who from the world thus in you suffers, is the same also who has said, 'Take courage, I have overcome the world.' "

* Christianus alter Christus.

† 2 Tim. iii. 12.

CHAPTER III.

DISTINCTIVE MARKS OF THE CHURCH.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Unity of faith and government a mark of the true Church.

Wherefore, O my God, must it be that men should separate what Thou hast united? Wherefore so many religious bodies in the world, each claiming to belong to Thee, and to be the Church which Thy Divine Son has founded; each, nevertheless opposed in important points, to the rest? There is, for instance, the so called Greek Church, which the great schism of the ninth century brought into existence. Then, too, before our eyes, in its countless ramifications, there is the vast Protestant association, with which again other sects, of earlier or later growth, dispute the palm. It is obvious to ask which among all these bodies is that which it professes to be—the Church of God? And in order to the resolution of this question, another becomes necessary, “What, if any, are the distinctive marks by which the true Church may be discerned?”

Christian antiquity supplies us with an answer. Listen, for example, to the General Council of Nice, assembled before the division of East and West, "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." Such are the four marks, which, as the whole of early Christianity agreed, must necessarily be found in the true Church. Unity, Sanctity, Catholicity, Apostolicity; and it is my joy to know that they are found, and found solely, in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, whose child by the grace of God, I am.

First, then, the Church of Christ must possess Unity. She must be One; one, that is to say by the union of all her members, in one faith and one government.

One she must be in her faith. Our adorable Lord and Master has not left us two different doctrines, but one only, that of His Father who sent Him.* There is not in Him "it is" and "it is not," as St. Paul expresses it.† Accordingly, in the Holy Scriptures, the faithful are entreated above all things to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,"‡ to "be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment,"§ avoiding a man that is a heretic and perseveres obstinately in his error.|| Tradition throughout abounds in testimonies to the same effect; and if we ask the Fathers to decide for us, they rise like a cloud of witnesses,¶ each and all affirming that the Faith

* John vii. 16.

† Eph. iv. 3.

|| Tit. iii. 10.

† 2 Cor. i. 19.

§ Philipp. ii. 2.

¶ Heb. xii. 1.

of the Church can be but one; that the least alloy is sufficient to corrupt it; and that a single drop of poison infused into that heavenly chalice,—a single error intermixed with the truth,—destroys it altogether, and converts into a draught of death the elixir of immortality.

As respects unity of government, which consists in the submission of all the faithful to one authority, the Scriptures are not less precise. All the figures under which our Lord speaks of the Church, presuppose and demand it. A Sheepfold, a House, a Family, a City, a Kingdom—what were these if divided? Division would be their annihilation. “Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”* Such is the declaration of Eternal Wisdom. If then the Church corresponds with these divinely chosen figures, it must necessarily enjoy unity of government; there must be in all its members a subjection to one same authority, and this authority must unite them all in itself, and direct them by one same rule to one same end.

Now, on applying these principles to the various sects in antagonism to the Roman Communion, it needs very little examination to see that unity is not theirs, in any true sense of the term. For them, in fact, believing as they do, simply what each in his private judgment deems fit, and no more, the very idea of a rule of faith can hardly be said to exist. Their history, accordingly, is

* Matt. xii. 25.

little else than a record of perpetual and inevitable variations. "They may seem to agree," remarks St. Irenæus, of the sects of his own day, "but they have not a veritable unity." Agreement to differ is one thing, unity of belief another. Heretics boast of their mutual toleration, though even this they are very far from practising; but they are not "made perfect in one."*

Neither, again, are they one in government. Some of them, such for instance as the Church of England, unite to the semblance of a hierarchy a jurisdiction which they profess to derive from the state; and are rather to be viewed as portions of the political or social system of the countries which they occupy, than as distinct religious bodies. Others, while holding themselves apart from state interference, are at the mercy of their own delegates, who, without pretension to orders, enjoy not even the shadow of an authority capable of deciding upon the numerous important questions to which Christianity gives rise.

But it is not enough to say that these various sects do not possess unity. They do not even wish to possess it. They have no esteem, no love, no desire for it. Understood as we understand it, namely, as essential to the existence of the true Church of Christ, it has no attraction for them. Under the guise of a convenient but deplorable theory of toleration, they have introduced a sacrilegious indifference, which consists in regarding all that presents itself under the aspect of religion as equally good; or in other words, in

* John xvii. 23.

not admitting as absolutely true, any one religious system whatever; sapping thus the very notion of faith.

That this is the real tendency of all heretical organizations, especially in later times, their conduct and their own avowals leave no doubt whatever. Nevertheless their teachers contrive to deceive by their language the incautious; and it may be that in their ignorance of the things of God some of them deceive even themselves, imagining, as an ancient Father expresses it, that "in heaping together errors, they are consolidating the truth."

Not in such chimeras consists the unity of Thy Church, O my God, that unity which is so dear to her, and for which she fought so hard, after her battle for thine was over and won. For three centuries she endured all imaginable persecutions rather than adore any other God but Thee; and for fifteen centuries more she has never ceased to maintain by Councils, by the voice of Tradition, and by the writings of her doctors, that as there is no other faith, no other God but hers, so, too, there is no religious unity on earth but hers.

And this unity the object of so many struggles, she has in point of fact maintained inviolate, to the astonishment of her enemies; who could never comprehend the mystery of its preservation through so many ages in the Catholic Church, nor, indeed, unreasonably, seeing in her as they did, no more than what they discover in their own bodies, an institution purely human, sustained by the exertions, eloquence, and address of men.

On such a supposition unity had no more remained to us than it has to them. But that it has remained ours, proves that supposition unreal. An edifice destined to outlast the world is not to be raised up on the moving sands of human efforts however great. God Himself must be the life of a system which remains one and identical through ages without variation, without addition, without diminution. It is the tendency of truth to "decay from among the children of men."* God alone can preserve it incorrupt; and consequently where we find the same truth abiding from age to age, there we are bound to recognise the presence and the agency of that God "whose truth abideth for ever."†

It remains to enquire how this great miracle has been wrought; by what instrumentality God has preserved intact in His Church that unity of faith and discipline which is unaccountable on any mere human theory.

SECOND MEDITATION.

Secret of Catholic Unity.

When I was a child, and understood as a child, and thought as a child, † I recollect that I could never view without profound astonishment, the lofty arches in our ancient Churches. I used to

* Ps. xi. 2.

† Ps. cxvi. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 11.

lose myself in conjecturing how it was that those enormous blocks could support themselves in air, and form a solid roof overhead ; and sometimes I would start for terror, as a lively imagination represented them to me on the point of separating and coming down with a crash. But I was then only a child, and knew not the secret of these marvellous works.

One day it was my good fortune to penetrate the mystery. Somebody pointed out to my notice the keystone, which placed at the summit of the arch, serves as a central point towards which all the other stones converge, and without which they would drop apart. I understood, and admired.

O my God, Thy Holy Church, as it seems to me, resembles one of these mysterious and symmetrical constructions. All in it is so admirably united. And I would desire, for my consolation, to discover the keystone which holds it together in one. With this object, let me step, so to say, a few paces back, and endeavour to take in at one glance, this marvellous arch of Thine which embraces heaven and earth within its span.

The Catholic Church, then, as we have already seen, viewed in its totality, is the society of the Angels and of the just of all times. From all eternity it had its type in God Himself, that is to say, in the ineffable union of the adorable Trinity. Summoned, at last, into existence, it traverses the ages, it walks the earth, it passes from country to country, in order to blend all mankind with itself in universal unity, and so to return with

them again into that eternity from whence it issued.

To fill up the place of the fallen Angels God created man. He made him "to His own image and likeness."* He made him not alone, but associated with him a companion of his own kind. He gave them commandments to test their obedience.

They broke the law of the Most Holy and fell; and in them fell also their children, and losing the grace of God became subject to Satan, sin, and death. But "mercy exalts itself above judgment."† A Redeemer is announced. He is announced as to be born of a woman, and to be the destruction of the wily serpent, who is smit with an eternal anathema.

As a preliminary to this great work of mercy, God calls Abraham, and forms from him a peculiar people to be the leaven of salvation to mankind.

Types and prophecies prepare the world for the coming of "the desired of all nations."‡ He is born in Bethlehem in the fulness of time. After a life replete with miracles and deeds of mercy, the hatred of His enemies prevails against Him. He dies an atoning victim on Mount Calvary, and the Cross is the instrument of His death.

And all this while, Jesus—this man of sorrows—this sport of princes and people—is nevertheless Lord of lords, and King of kings, who suffers only because He wills to suffer. It is His own choice, to overcome sin and hell and reconcile

* Gen. i. 26.

† James ii. 13.

‡ Agg. ii. 8.

man to His Father, not by strength but by weakness; not by glory but by ignominy; not by life but by death. Such is the mysterious dispensation of our God.

Dead and buried, He rises again—assembles His scattered Apostles—gives them laws for the regulation of His Church—and ascends thither from whence He came.

Ten days after His departure the Twelve appear publicly in Jerusalem, coming out from the concealment in which they had remained till then from fear of the Jews. Peter announces to the multitude, that He whom they had crucified has risen again from the grave; that He is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the judge of the living and the dead, and that there is no salvation given under heaven except in His name. And first three thousand, and then five thousand, are converted.

Time goes on. The Apostles are persecuted, martyred, removed from the scene; and Nero commences a war of three centuries against Christ and His Church.

And in the midst of this war between good and evil,—this war begun by Satan and continued by his children—what becomes of the chief of the Apostles? Where is he to whom it was said, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it?”* Nations disappear, thrones crumble in dust—the Roman empire is torn to shreds by barbarian hordes, the Greek empire by

the Turks—but he of whom we speak is ever at his post, and endures through all. Peter continually survives in the person of the Roman Pontiffs who uninterruptedly succeed him. Age after age he presides over the Church Catholic, and is the one pastor of the one sheepfold.

Here, then, resides the strength and unity of the Catholic Church—here in Peter! He is that centre from which all its forces incessantly radiate, and to which they as constantly return.

In order to render His Church immoveable, and to secure her an organization capable of resisting every element of dissolution that human rashness may introduce within her, what is it our Lord does? He sets her up as a sacred monarchy. He establishes a ministry within her which, shared among a multitude of pastors, shall nevertheless be reunited and centred in one sole spiritual power, the source of all the rest. He places at the head of His Church a second self, a representative of His might as of His love—a Pontiff mortal as ourselves, but ever living in his successors, and who as the faithful image of that eternal Pontiff, whose vicar he is, will encircle all mankind in the ineffable embrace of his pastoral charity. Priests there shall be in every corner of the Catholic Church, each at the head of his own flock. Bishops there shall be in every province, uniting under one crozier numerous parishes; but notwithstanding the vast number of Bishops, of Priests, of flocks, there shall be but one Hierarchy, but one Episcopate, because all shall con-

tinue united in one faith, under the jurisdiction of one sole supreme Head!

Such is the secret of that unity which constitutes, O my God, so marvellous a peculiarity of Thy Church, and which shall never suffer the gates of hell to prevail against her.



THIRD MEDITATION.

Sanctity a mark of the Church.

Lord, I approach, with all loving reverence, to consider the second mark of thy Church, sanctity, that divine gift which so surpassingly evinces the presence within her of Him, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, the Spirit of life.

A man is known by his look;* and when we recognise in his countenance that ruddiness of complexion which usually indicates a sound constitution, we at once judge his health to be good, and that as Holy Scripture expresses it, a plentiful sap "moistens his bones."† So, too, with the sanctity of the Church. It is no mere hidden gift. Rich in countless graces which God has lavished upon her, she cannot but exhibit externally somewhat of these perfections; and thus holiness becomes a mark by which the true Church is readily distinguishable from false communions.

Holy, first and foremost must she be in her Founder. Herself so pure and perfect a work,

* Ecclesiasticus xix. 26.

† Prov. iii. 8.

whence can she proceed but from a most pure and perfect author? That Law which it is hers to administer, so holy, so just, more excellent than "silver tried by the fire, purged from the earth, and refined seven times;"* could God have given it by the hand of a mediator less perfect than itself?

As the Church must needs be holy in its founder, so must she be holy also in her end and object, which can only be to make men holy by destroying in them the dominion of sin, and establishing them in justice. Holy, too, must she be in the means which she employs to this end, and which must necessarily be worthy of her, worthy of her divine object, and worthy of that God whom she serves.

But this is not all. Thy true Church, O my God, that Church which Thou hast redeemed with the Blood of Thy Eternal Son, and purified with Thy eternal Spirit, must needs be holy most especially in her very self. "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people."† Such is the description that St. Peter gives of the faithful, though even in his day not all Christians were in a state of grace any more than now. Even then, in the infancy of the Church, scandals had arisen, as arise they will to the end. Witness the disorders condemned by St. Paul among the Christians of Corinth.‡ The Church, however, does

* Ps. xi. 7.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 11.

not cease to be holy on this account ; for still all her members, without exception, are consecrated to God by baptism ; all are bound to a holy life ; vast numbers of them are in a state of grace ; and many in a very eminent degree of holiness, so as to merit the name of Saint in its highest significance.

And now applying what has been said to the religious communions separated from the Roman obedience, let us ask, with all charity to them, do they possess, do they exhibit this distinctive mark of sanctity ?

The Greek Church, for instance, since it withdrew from the Holy See, and set itself up in schism—what tokens of sanctity has it to show ? Are they to be discovered in the originators of that schism ? Alas ! it was the frenzied ambition of these men, as is well known, that brought on that miserable separation. Are they to be discovered in the extraordinary sanctity of its members ? Numerous as the saints of the Greek Church were, anterior to its unhappy isolation, it cannot cite, from that day to this, the name of a single individual, supereminent for sanctity, and on whom God has bestowed that gift of miracles which evinces its presence. “ We know that God doth not hear sinners.”* We know, that is to say, that He does not grant to their prayers the performance of extraordinary and miraculous works. “ But if a man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth.” Now, it is a certain fact, that no heroic sanctity, no mira-

* John ix. 31.

cle in proof of it, can be appealed to by the Greek Church, since it broke with Rome. From that moment it became "as a dry tree in the wilderness."*

Where, again, is the sanctity of the Protestant Churches? Does it appear in their founders? Not even those who unhappily belong to them have the boldness to say so. They prudently abandon to the justice of history, and to its formidable sentence, the fathers of their faith: the men after whose name, it may be, they are designated, even while they repudiate the humiliating connection. All they stickle for is this—liberty to believe what they choose—liberty to ignore the true Church of God. Their religion in the long-run has become, or is rapidly becoming, reduced to this one point. As regards those monstrous doctrines to which the so-called reformation gave birth at its rise, and which tend to encourage every species of vice, these, for the most part, they have found it convenient to set aside; and it is indeed only at the price of this rejection that they are able to practise any of those moral virtues which they still retain. That fatal doctrine, for instance, announced by the early reformers, "that a man once justified can never fall from justification, whatever sins he may commit;" whither would it carry the Protestant, did he permit it free scope? Or that other—"that good works are unnecessary, nay, even prejudicial to our salvation?" or, "that want of faith is the sole thing which causes a man's damnation;" or, "that we

* Ecclesiasticus vi. 3.

are justified by faith only ;” or, “ that a Christian man’s conscience cannot be bound by any law whatsoever ;” or, “ that when a man sins it is God Himself who necessitates him,” and the like. Whither would such principles lead? They would lead inevitably into an abyss of crime, from which every honest mind recoils in horror. Hence it is that at the present day they are all but forsaken by Protestants themselves; and the better amongst them are content to supply the loss of distinctness in their religious views by a general sentiment of charity, ignoring on system all dogmatic teaching.

Ah, Lord, how clearly I see that there is nothing here of the spirit of Thy true Church; and that it is mere trifling to look amongst the reformed communions for Thy divine manifestations.

As to miracles, we all know what reply the early reformers made, when these were demanded of them. The only miracle they could suggest was that of their own successful audacity in revolting against the Church. From that time till now they have seldom made pretension to more, except in cases of deplorable fanaticism, condemned even by themselves; while, on the other hand, the Catholic Church has not only enjoyed miraculous gifts all along, but has never ceased appealing to them in proof of her divine mission.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

Sanctity a mark of the Church, continued.

O Holy Church of my God, day by day, in studying Thy history, I find in it fresh aliment for faith and love. Next to the Holy Scriptures, whose value is beyond compare, nothing appears better adapted to form the true Christian, and to console him under all his trials, than Thy wondrous records, continued by various writers, from the Acts of the Apostles, down to the present time.

True it is, in their perusal, we occasionally come upon afflicting scandals. All the children of the Church have not been saints. And there have been those amongst them, at the recital of whose deeds the true Catholic must hide his head for shame. But, O divine Church of my Saviour, let me say that if the conduct of thy children is often a source of pain and perplexity, continually, on the other hand, do we find proofs of thy solicitude for their salvation. Everywhere art thou to be found repeating the words of St. Paul, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I do not burn?"* Ever art thou occupied in preventing disorders as far as thou possibly canst; and, when they occur, in making reparation for them, and applying the best remedies; and this with a spirit so sweet, so patient, and at

* 2 Cor xi. 29.

the same time so invincibly courageous, that thy sanctity shines forth the more. Everywhere and always I behold thee—in the Councils of thy summoning—in thy Sovereign Pontiffs—in the Doctors who defend thy rights—in thy Bishops whom the Holy Ghost sets over the faithful—in the simple priest—in the inferior members of thy hierarchy—everywhere and always I behold thee, engaged in diffusing a spirit of holiness; in redressing wrongs; in correcting abuses; and in counteracting the sad effects of that corruption introduced by the fall, which, while man is man, must ever make itself felt here below.

And so thou art holy, O Church of my God, with a holiness of thine own; and it is only by unworthily travestying thee and perverting thy doctrines, through the grossest calumnies, that thine enemies are able to bring aught against thee. Thou art holy in thy teaching, in thy example, in thy painstaking efforts for the good of all, in thy very self; and if some of thy children unhappily wander astray and are lost, it is solely because they refuse to hear thy voice.

In the main, however, with what wonderful success are thy labours attended! What numbers are there who listen to thee, and profit by thy instructions, exhibiting in many instances, the most excellent fruits of virtue! Everywhere, even during the most inauspicious periods, we find saints, and great saints. Their names, their lives, their examples make bright the page of history. Theirs it was to practise at the highest point of perfection not only the precepts of the

Gospel, but its counsels also; a class of virtues unknown outside thy pale. For to thee alone belongs that glory, which heretics dare not dispute with thee—the glory of bringing into existence and multiplying within thee, the devoted children of voluntary poverty; the disciples of vowed obedience; and the chaste souls to whom it is given to “receive” that “word” of Christ* concerning purity, and to perpetuate upon earth the blessed virgin race. To thee alone belongs the glory of presenting to the world those great heroes of Christianity, whose lives are full of wonder; whose works wring admiration even from the infidel, and who become the benefactors and often the saviours of society.

I have alluded more than once to the miracles of the Church. That they are an evidence of her sanctity who can doubt? Assuredly God would not thus have distinguished her, unless she were the veritable Spouse of Christ. If instances can be pointed to, in which a Christian populace may have been too hasty in inferring supernatural agency; it is nevertheless simply impossible for any reflecting and unprejudiced mind to refuse assent to matters of fact attested by witnesses above all suspicion, and even hostile to the Church; and a vast number of which, in cases of canonization, have been judicially examined and approved.

What shall we say of the zeal exhibited by the Church in the fulfilment of her divine end, the conversion of the nations, and the extension of

* Matt. xix. 11.

Christ's Kingdom? Her missionary labours alone, so instinct with zeal and the burning love of souls, are a proof of her sanctity. This is felt by the heathen themselves, who quickly distinguish between her true Apostles, and those traffickers in disguise whom heresy sends out at an enormous expense, and who, for the most part, have an eye much more to private and family interests than to the cause of God. It is one thing to scatter bibles at random as you pass luxuriously through a country; another to preach the Gospel in the sweat of your brow, at the peril of your life, and in the midst of frightful privations, repeating ever with St. Paul, "I seek not the things that are yours but you."*

Yes, thou art holy, O Church Catholic! Thy doctrines show it. Thy Saints show it. Thy miracles show it. Thy labours show it. Thou art holy, and thus it comes to pass that those who seek for holiness betake themselves to thee. An intuitive impulse, a divine attraction, ever inclines in thy direction, both nations and individuals, when they turn to God. Then alone they withdraw from thee, when they purpose to withdraw from Him. But does a man desire innocence, chastity, and that "good conscience" which is the ordinary accompaniment of "a pure heart and faith unfeigned,"† he turns to the Catholic Church. He is well aware that she imposes a yoke; but then he knows again that her yoke is that of Jesus. Well, he knows that she places a curb upon the passions, but he has learnt that

* II Cor. xii. 14.

† II Tim. i. 5.

this very curb directs while it restrains. Thus impressed he draws nigh. A sweet yearning after virtue impels him on. He draws nigh to the Church; and lo! as he approaches an inviting odour, a balmy air that fills and vivifies the heart—a breath that seems to have traversed the heavenly land and to have stolen its sweets—a divine atmosphere, not entirely devoid perchance of some earthly taint, since it is the fate of the Church to reckon amongst her members both the good and the wicked, but an atmosphere nevertheless which is incessantly purifying itself, and which, to all who will, is the spirit of life. Of this spirit he drinks and is blessed. He desired virtue, and lo! he has found it in its very source.

Who ever heard of a man leaving the Catholic Church in order to become a better Christian, or to make a safer and happier death? Never was there an instance of it. The sole reason that prompts men to leave the Church is their wish to unshackle themselves of all rule, and to live in a state of sin under the pretence of liberty.* And when they sincerely desire to return to God, then they return again to that Catholic Church, which, after years of neglect, they still recognise as the sole refuge of the repentant sinner.

O my God, I desire to be holy, since Thy Church is holy and since I am her child. The least stain on my soul seems to dishonour her to whom the Holy Ghost has said, “Thou art all

* 1 Peter ii. 16.

fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in Thee.”* I wish to merit that appellation which the Apostles gave to the first Christians. They called them “Saints.” Oh blessed title! the inheritance of God’s true children! unceasingly reminding us of our high calling, and of our obligation to live worthily of it!

Yes, Lord, I desire to be holy, and never, as I humbly trust, shall the example of sinners draw me away from this resolution. I know the Apostles have foretold that “in the last time there shall come mockers, walking according to their own desires in impieties, sensual men, not having the Spirit.”† Of these I will beware. While I lament the wrong they do Thee and their own souls, I will keep myself at a distance from their evil contamination, that I may be more worthy of that Church which “Christ loved, and for which He delivered Himself up that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”‡

* Cant. iv. 7.

† Jude 18.

‡ Eph. v. 25.

FIFTH MEDITATION.

Catholicity a mark of the Church.

Come, my soul, let us in fancy mount aloft; and looking down, as from a point in distant space, upon the globe beneath us, let us ask ourselves, which of all religious communions can justly lay claim to that august title of Prophecy—"Ask of me and I will give thee the Gentiles for thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession."* Promise most magnificent! made to the Church in the person of its Founder, and the accomplishment of which changes her from Jewish to Catholic.

That the true religion should be universal, should embrace all places and all times, was indeed fixed and inevitable. The covenant made with Abraham and his descendants, that in them all the nations of the earth should be blessed, must needs be fulfilled. The language of our Lord on the subject is as precise as can be. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations.....and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."† And again, "You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth."‡ His veritable Church, accordingly, must be wholly without terrestrial limitation. It must be for the Gentile no less than for the Jewish

* Ps. li. 8.

† Matt. xxviii. 19.

‡ Acts i. 8.

world. "To you it behoved us," says St. Paul, addressing the obstinate and unbelieving Jews, "to speak first the word of God: but seeing you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles; for so the Lord hath commanded us: I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the uttermost part of the earth." *

Yes! Catholic she must be if she be at all. This is evident enough. But let us return to our imaginary prospect. Look round, then, O my soul, on the scene beneath, and declare which among all existing religious bodies can make this title of Catholicity her legitimate boast.

See, near at hand, the so-called reformed Church of the sixteenth century. How vast the space which at first sight it seems to occupy, at least in some portions of Europe, and of the new world! But be not disturbed, my soul. What thou seest, observe it well, is not one same identical Church, but simply a variety of disconnected and opposed sects lying together at random. One thing is the oak of centuries, overspreading an entire field with its ample foliage; another a litter of broken branches scattered about under the feet, not forming one whole, nor permeated by the sap of life. The former is the Church Catholic; the latter the confused medley of Protestant sects, which may bear perhaps a common name, but neither are nor can be, from the very nature of

* Acts xiii. 46.

the case, the one Catholic Church of the living God.

Impressed by the force of this truth, the schismatics of our day will sometimes call to their aid the ancient heretical sects, endeavouring by a community of error to establish for themselves a species of Catholicity at least in point of time. But vain is their attempt. It may always be said to them, as Tertullian said to others in his day, "You are but of yesterday. We know your origin and the name of your founder." In vain do they throw open their communions to all comers, and then exclaim that the whole Catholic world is theirs. These members gathered together at random—these doctrines, so dissimilar and irreconcilable, possess no real unity. The true Church, on the other hand, we cannot too often repeat it, while universal, is also one. She is, in the language of St. Cyprian, the one sun darting its rays in all quarters—the one fountain-head of countless streams—the one tree extending its boughs on all sides. With her all is Catholicity in Unity. With the heretical communions all is multiplicity in diversity. St. Augustine has, by anticipation, described the modern sects, in portraying those of his own day. "Their communions," he says, "are like the straws which you see lying about outside the barn floor, each of them separated from the others, and all from the Church. 'Christ is here,' say some. 'No, He is here,' say others. And you will see them exhibiting with pride the branch to which they severally belong; their sole bond of agreement being their common hatred

of the ancient trunk from which they are separated."*

The Greek schismatical Church can make no better claim. Who is ignorant that its existence commences half way down the ages of Christianity, and that in extent it barely exceeds the limits of one single country?

Still less shall we find the mark of Catholicity in the Oriental communions, such as the Nestorians and the Eutychians. There is obviously no proportion between these languishing, obscure, societies, and that New Jerusalem, into which "the strength of the Gentiles" was to come, † the gates of which were to be open continually, and not to be shut by day or night, that the kings of the Gentiles might be brought into her. No! promises so grand, so world-wide, have nothing in common with these ignoble sects.

The Roman Catholic Church, and she alone can claim them as her own by right. Not that even she is so spread over the face of the earth, as to occupy it entirely, at one and the same time. The fulfilment of the divine promises does not require so much as this. When the Scriptures speak of the whole earth, they need not necessarily be understood to mean the whole absolutely; nor again the whole at once. They speak in a general sense, and according to the ordinary use of terms. As, for instance, when we say that the Romans at such a period were masters of the whole world.

Yet even geographically viewed, how wondrous

* Contr. Crescent.

† Is. lx. 5.

is the spectacle which she presents ! Look around, once again, O my soul, from thy imaginary point in space. Look around thee, and say, Does not the Holy Roman Catholic Church meet thine eyes in all quarters of the globe ? Whichever way thou gazest, are not her children to be seen, more or less numerous ? Europe alone reckons between one and two hundred millions of them : Asia, Africa, America, Australia, above another hundred million. Incessantly extending herself, she repairs in one region the losses which she experiences in another. And with still better reason now, than at any former period, may her children exclaim with St. Pacian, “ My name is Christian, my surname Catholic.”

Oh, how intimately do I feel the power of that name, Catholic ! in binding our hearts to Holy Church ! That glorious title it was that so fascinated and held fast the great Augustine, as he himself testifies. With him I exult in the sense of a unity at once so central and so diffusive. It is the delight of my soul to contemplate this city of the great King, this hill of Sion “ founded with the joy of the whole earth,”* and towards which all betake themselves who obey the Gospel call. I love this Holy Church, whose Head is in the heavens ; whose body fills the earth ; whose voice uprising from all parts of the world, conjoins in one mighty prayer ; and whose merits support my weakness, while they enrich my poverty. I love this Holy Church, which, bedewed with the blood of martyrs and the tears of penitents, unfolds its

* Ps. xlvii. 3.

countless leaves for the healing of the nations. Especially, and above all, I love her in her Catholicity, that lovely characteristic of the true Spouse of Christ, which, in the language of St. Ambrose, "distinguishes her from the offsprings of heresy and schism, as the pure and graceful lily in the midst of thorns."*

SIXTH MEDITATION.

Apostolicity a mark of the Church.

Let us glance back once again at the early history of Christianity. What do we behold? We behold the Apostles passing from country to country, preaching, converting, founding churches in the principal cities, and establishing in them their Sees. We behold other cities in turn deriving from these mother churches the apostolic doctrine and ordinances. And from the system thus founded, we behold, age after age, the great Christian Church proceed. Hence it comes to pass that whatever society claims to be the true Church, must of necessity be able to trace its origin back to the Apostles by an uninterrupted succession of legitimate pastors, and by a continuous profession of the same identical faith which the Apostles received from Christ.

The Church is a fold, but what is a fold without its Shepherds? She must then have her

* In Ps. lxxviii.

shepherds, and her succession of them through the whole period of her existence. The Church is a kingdom; but no kingdom is without its government, much less that spiritual kingdom which Christ has founded. It must then have its spiritual governors, acknowledged, accredited, by God. In no other way can it become permanent, and so realise that word of prophecy, "His power is an everlasting power, that shall not be taken away, and His kingdom that shall not be destroyed."* But these spiritual governors, these pastors and rulers of the Church of God, so multiplied as they must needs become over the world with the lapse of time,—from whence are they to draw their authority? "No man taketh this honour to himself but he that is called by God as Aaron was."† "How," says St. Paul, "can they preach unless they be sent; as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, of them that bring glad tidings of good things."‡ It is necessary then that somewhere within the Church there should exist at all times, a living and accessible source from whence the Apostolic mission and jurisdiction flow, and where they are to be obtained.

So, too, must the true Church be ever in possession of the Apostolic doctrine. The Apostles received the deposit of the faith not for themselves alone, but to be transmitted in all its integrity through their Successors down to the close of ages.

* Dan. vii. 14.

† Heb. v. 4.

‡ Rom. x. 15.

What they learnt either immediately from our Lord, or by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they were charged to confide to chosen followers, who were themselves to pass it in turn to those after them as a sacred and inviolable heritage. "The things which thou hast heard from me before many witnesses," writes St. Paul, to one whom he had himself ordained, "the same commend to faithful men, who shall be fit to teach others also."* This deposit then the true Church must show to be in her own hands. This deposit she must preserve without a shadow of alteration, and must transmit age after age to the world's end. And wherever this deposit is found, there, we may be sure, exists also that perpetually abiding source, already referred to, of mission and jurisdiction, which no man can legitimately receive from himself.

Oh! with what confidence I seek, with what joy I discover, these indubitable marks of Apostolicity in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, that dear and venerable mother of our souls!

And first she is Apostolic in her descent; who doubt it? St. Paul's own Epistle to the Romans is a demonstration of the fact. Not to add that the most authentic documents of history exhibit to us St. Peter and St. Paul, as consummating at Rome at once their apostolate and their martyrdom. Yes! There it is that, in the person of St. Peter, we behold the first link of that marvellous chain, which descends unbroken down to the Sovereign Pontiff now occupying the Holy

* 11 Tim. ii. 2.

See. "What binds me to the Church," says St. Augustine, "is to behold in her the uninterrupted succession of Pontiffs, from St. Peter downwards, till we come to the supreme Pastor who in his place now rules the flock of Christ." Oh! if, four centuries after the first preaching of the Gospel this bond was already so powerful as to hold the mighty genius of Augustine fast in its thrall; now after a trial of eighteen centuries, how shall it not suffice for the intellect of our day?

Yes, O holy Roman Catholic Church, thou descendest from the Apostles beyond all possibility of doubt, and as such inheritest their jurisdiction. They commenced the conquest of the world to Christ, and thou through the long ages art engaged in completing their victory. Neither art thou the inheritor of their jurisdiction only. Their doctrine also is thine. As Christ received it from His Father, and they from Christ, so thou from them. Thou believest all that they believed. Thou teachest all that they taught. Thine enemies, I well know, have accused thee of having tampered with this deposit of the faith. But to accuse is one thing, to give proof another; and in spite of their utmost efforts never have they been able to bring aught against thee but cruel calumnies, or the most absurd misrepresentations. Witness, for instance, their infatuated obstinacy in taxing thee with idolatry because of the worship which thou renderest the Saints, utterly regardless of thine own unceasing protest, that thou dost not offer them divine adoration, but only that homage which is due to

them, as the worthiest and dearest friends of God. And so with the rest.

Meanwhile they totally fail to explain how the sacred deposit of the faith could have been changed, as they say, and yet none observe this change at the time, notwithstanding that so many eager glances, both friendly and hostile, are ever directed upon the Roman Catholic Church, so that, like our Lord, she is continually watched by all.* Assign, O ye foes of Christianity, assign if ye can the precise periods when these pretended alterations took place—alterations which you describe as so grave in their character. They can do nothing of the sort. But they have a theory of their own. Let us hear it. “The change,” they say, “took place by degrees and insensibly.” And is it to be imagined, then, that the sentinels of Israel were all asleep at the same time? That so many saints, and bishops, and priests, and pious laymen, over the earth, allowed, without a single word, corruptions of doctrine to glide into the very bosom of Christianity, sufficient to change the whole of their faith? No. Such a supposition is against reason, not to add that such innovations however gradual, would have left some trace in history, whereas no such trace appears.

This apostolicity of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, carried on in a continuous line of sacred Pontiffs from St. Peter to the present day, whilst it is her own great glory is, at the same time, the strong safeguard and irrefragable support of all Catholics. Linked thus in the closest bonds of

* Luke xiv. 1.

union, with the Apostles and their divine Lord, we know and have clearly before us our divine origin. But it is far otherwise with the sects that exist external to the Roman obedience. Say and do what they please, the modern and purely human sources from which they spring cannot be concealed. The names they bear indicate the period when their formation commenced, and anterior to which they were not. It were vain to look in them for aught identical with the Catholic Church. They are simply human societies, founded by such and such individuals; either by secession from other bodies already in a state of schism; or by direct separation from the Church herself on pretexts more or less specious, and in total oblivion of the great fundamental truth that no cause can ever necessitate the rupture of ecclesiastical unity.

“False religions,” remarks Bossuet, “pretend a resemblance to the Church, and claim, in imitation of her, to have God for their founder. But such language on their lips is wholly without meaning. For if God has created man, if He has created Him in His own image, and if, regarding Him in that divine image, He has at no period disdained to be his teacher as to the best means of serving and pleasing Him—it follows that no religion can be of God which is unable to trace itself back to the beginning of the world.”

And again, speaking of sects and their founders, “It will always,” he says, “be manifest to the world that they and the sect founded by them

have detached themselves from the great Church which Christ established, in which St. Peter and his successors have ever held the primacy, and in which one of those successors was actually holding it at the time of their schism. The precise year of their separation will always be so accurately definable, that the heretics themselves will not be able to disavow it. This is inevitably the weak side of all Christian bodies established by human instrumentality. No one can change the past. No one can give himself predecessors, or contrive to have found them in possession. The Catholic Church, and she alone, occupies, with an incontestable continuity, all the preceding ages of the world. The Patriarchs—the Law—the Gospel—all is one series from Adam to Christ, from Christ till now; and that series is hers.”

Such being the case, what becomes of mission and jurisdiction among the heretics and schismatics of our time? Obviously they have extinguished it, so far as they are concerned, in its very source; and we may apply to them those awful words, in which speaking of certain prophets but not His own, the Almighty says, “I did not send prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.”*

And, indeed, how is it possible that God could have sent them, their doctrine not being that of His divine Son? From among the various points of Catholic belief they have simply made choice (as the word heresy implies) of those which they

best fancied; those which they found least startling to that natural reason which, with all its arrogance, is incapable, nevertheless, of sounding the divine depths; or which were less likely in their view to displease the world—that world so sensual, so devilish, so blind to “the things that are of the Spirit of God,”* and for whose feelings the Apostles showed so little tenderness. And instead of presenting to men the whole sum of Gospel Faith in its formidable but requisite integrity, “subverting human counsels and every height that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every understanding to the obedience of Christ”†—instead, I repeat, of fulfilling this difficult but sacred duty, their line has been to preach a Gospel accommodated to circumstances—a Gospel which, under their hands, has so reduced its articles of faith, that to the vast body of Protestants it has become little more than a moral code, allowing them to believe what they will, provided they live honestly, and maintain a respectable exterior.

How far happier is our lot, who by God’s grace, and calling, and not because of any good in us, find ourselves members of an Apostolic communion, infallible in all matters of faith and endowed with divine authority! “O holy Roman Catholic Church,” we may exclaim with Fenelon, “O dear and common country of all Christians, in Thee there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, but all are made one in Christ, all are fellow-citizens of Rome,

* I Cor. ii. 14.

† II Cor. x. 5.

and all that is Catholic is Roman! In thee we behold that noble tree planted by the hand of Christ Himself. Every branch separated from thee fades away, and withers to nought. O Mother of our souls, whosoever is God's child is thine also. O divine Spouse, still after so many ages, art thou prolific as ever; still unceasingly thou bearest children to thy Lord in all the ends of the earth. O Church from whence Peter shall for ever confirm his brethren! may my right hand be forgotten if ever I forget thee. May my tongue become parched and dry, if thou be not to my last breath the chief joy of my life, and the theme of my song."

CHAPTER IV.

SERVICES RENDERED BY THE CHURCH TO MANKIND
IN THE SPIRITUAL ORDER.

FIRST MEDITATION.

Recapitulation.—The author's apology for his work.

Let us look back for a moment at what we have been engaged upon.

We have been contemplating, then, the Church in her various phases. First we viewed her as ideally pre-existent in the very bosom of Deity; then, as entering upon creation, and taking form after the type of the Blessed Trinity. From the Angelic hierarchies we traced her extending herself to the children of the elder Covenants, and subsequently to those of the New. Weak in herself, but strong in her God, we then marked her rapid development through later ages: and in the last chapter we have been employed in establishing and applying her distinctive marks, which has resulted in the conclusion that this mystical Body of Christ, this Spouse of the Eternal Spirit, this Mother of God's true children, is no other than

the Church of Rome, which alone can call itself One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

And, here, in order to avoid confusion of ideas, it may be well to state clearly what we understand by the Church of Rome.

We do not, then, here limit its meaning simply to the Roman diocese. We embrace within it the whole body of Christians throughout the world in communion with Rome. And in this we do but follow tradition; for, from the earliest times Christian antiquity has ever revered the Holy See of St. Peter as the centre of ecclesiastical unity.

It is of this Catholic, this Roman, this Roman Catholic Church, that we have been speaking in the last two chapters. It is she also, and she alone, whose benefits to mankind, both spiritual and temporal, or rather God's benefits through her, we proceed to consider in the ensuing pages.

But, O my God, is not this attempt to set forth the greatness of Thy bounties, too much for my strength? Yes, most vividly I feel it to be so. But ought I for this reason to draw back from it, and to become dumb in Thy praise? Because I cannot say all, am I to say nothing? So did not think the great Augustine. "Woe to those, Lord," he says, "who are silent when Thou art the theme, for even those who speak best, appear to say nought, in comparison with Thy perfections."

Beyond my strength, then, as the subject assuredly is, I will nevertheless proceed with confidence, if it be only for the loving interest I feel

in it. I write not for the learned. For them there already exist treatises in abundance. I write that I may make the Church better known and better loved by simple souls, who will not expect of me profound disquisitions. A child never tires of praising his mother's goodness; and the listener, in consideration of his affection, excuses his infantine language. Nay, he is sometimes won over to admire the object of so much praise, and to think even the little speaker eloquent. Remember, dear reader, that I too am speaking of a mother—a mother no less mine than yours. You will then understand this boldness. You will excuse my deficiency of thought and language on the score of love; and profiting by this poor attempt, you will perhaps feel the necessity of studying the subject more deeply, and of promoting that study among those over whom you have influence.

And, then, too, O my God, Thou knowest under what circumstances I, Thy priest, write these pages. My life, my time, are not my own. Thou hast willed they should be dedicated to my brethren in Christ. I am of those who, with St. Paul, may say, "We are your servants through Jesus;"* who, with St. Augustine, feel: "To preach, to reprehend, to warn, to have the charge of all who offer themselves—what a weight, what a burden, what a labour is here!"

Such is my life; and it is only amidst the pre-occupations, and perpetual interruptions, which various duties entail, that I am able to pursue this

* 2 Cor. iv, 5.

work so dear to my heart, yet from its nature requiring a certain amount of tranquil thought. Often obliged by some call of charity which I cannot set aside, to put down my pen as soon as I have taken it up, I lose that train of ideas which occasionally will carry the mind on so smoothly; and once lost, it is not recovered without difficulty. Such at least is the case with myself. The literary man, with the whole day at his command, shuts himself up when he pleases, and suspends or prolongs his composition at will. The priest, the pastor, the confessor,—“a debtor to all,”* can only seize, as they fly, the few moments which his incessant duties leave unoccupied; and not rarely, it is with a heart laden with others' miseries in addition to his own—it is with a body fatigued, and a mind embarrassed by a thousand different cares, that he returns, when he should be rather seeking repose, to his perpetually interrupted studies.

Thou seest, Lord, my life, and the lives of so many others of Thy servants. Thou knowest it. I complain not of it. It is my joy and my crown. Nevertheless I would wish that those who read and judge these pages should take this consideration into account. And if, after that, they shall still discover aught in my book bearing fruit for their soul's good, they will understand that to Thee, Lord, belongs the honour of it, and will “glorify God in me.”†

* Rom. i. 14.

† Gal. i. 24.

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Catholic Church alone offers a sure path to salvation.

The benefits of the Church to mankind embrace a wide extent. Like piety, she has "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* What a fact is this! Christianity, while it has for its direct end a happy futurity, is the mainstay also of our earthly existence! Society—the family—the individual—all stand indebted to the Church, and cannot ignore her benefits without the profoundest ingratitude.

- Further on we shall turn our attention to the advantages thus resulting to mankind in the temporal order. In the present and following chapter, we shall find enough to occupy us in the consideration of the spiritual benefits rendered by the Church, which have the first claim to our regard, as being her primary object, while the temporal are rather incidental and accessory.

The Church is charged, and charged especially with the office of guiding mankind in the way of truth. Nor in this duty will she ever be wanting. Hers it is, and has been, and ever will be, to communicate that divine knowledge which alone is worth all our efforts to attain—the knowledge of salvation! While the frivolous and corrupt world, insulting the divine Majesty, reiterates

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

that infernal blasphemy, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways;"* the just soul aims at one thing only—to ascertain the path that leads to God and to walk therein! With the royal Psalmist she exclaims continually, "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God."† "Shew, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths; direct me in Thy truth;"‡ or with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"§

But here the question arises; where are we to look with infallible certainty for the manifestation of God's will? Where shall the human mind, bewildered as to its true position, and exhausted with fruitless struggles—where shall it betake itself for direction and rest? It is true, outside the Church we may hear fine promises, and assurances sufficiently positive, if that were all. But the moment we attempt to grasp them, they elude our touch, and disappear in emptiness. In this respect our own time presents too true a parallel to what we meet with in the lives of Justin, Cyprian, Augustine, and other Saints of antiquity. They, too, in their fruitless researches, exhausted the sects and philosophies of their day, and found in them either deception or insufficiency on all points concerning the great end of man. These great geniuses, whose wanderings perplexities, falls, and recoveries, God permitted no less for the general good of the Church than for their own—how I love to hear them detailing, each in

* Job. xxi. 14.

† Ps. cxlii. 10.

‡ Ps. xxiv. 4.

§ Acts ix. 6.

his own manner, the long and endless mazes into which their minds were borne away in their search after truth—their apparently vain efforts—their disappointments—their despair—and then at last their intense delight at discovering the long-wished-for treasure in the Catholic Church—that Church which they had so often passed by in contempt, but to whose bosom they now returned, as the fainting pilgrim of the desert comes back to the spring which he had despised before.

Oh how many Augustines, Cyprians, Justins, I have known in my time! but who, alas! more perverse than they, still persist, most of them in their unhappy delusion, “always learning, and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth;”* and for this reason: because they seek for it where it is not to be found; because they demand it of those who are in no sense its depositories; of those who dazzled by their boasted light of reason, can never be anything more than “blind leaders of the blind.”† These sectaries have always some new theory in hand by which they profess to clear up every difficulty; and which after all is not new, but a medley of other systems gone by, furbished up afresh and presented to the public in an attractive form. Their promises resemble those which Faustus the celebrated Manichean of the day made to the youthful Augustine. He had engaged to initiate him in all the secrets of science, to leave nothing unexplained, and to tear from his eyes the last veil

* 11 Tim. iii. 7.

† Matt. xv. 14.

that hides truth from mortal man. Time went on. The philosopher had his say, and when all was said, the clear intellect of Augustine was forced to admit that once again he had been illuded by a vain promiser, who spoke indeed more eloquently than the rest, but could discover to him no better than they, that path of salvation, of which the Church alone possesses the key.

Oh what felicity, dearest Lord, is ours, in having this Thy Church to draw us out of the vague uncertainties in which the human mind is tossed to and fro, when left exposed in its native weakness to "every wind of doctrine."* How can we bless Thee enough for having compensated for Thine absence, by the presence amongst us of that Holy Society which speaks in Thy name, and issues, in Thy stead, her infallible decrees? How gracious art Thou in providing this succour to our infirmity! We had lost Thy visible presence from off the earth. No more could we hear Thee preaching and teaching as in the days of Thy mortal life. We needed, therefore, some authority in Thy place—an authority, visible, speaking, infallible, to check the rise of error, to redress our ills, to be the guide of our life. We needed, in one word, Thy Church, and this need Thou hast supplied.

Instead of that Incarnate Word, of whom a voice from Heaven testified, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him,"† the Church is now our teacher, and to her we must hearken. Before

* Eph. iv. 14.

† Luke ix. 35.

Christ came, it was the office of the Synagogue to teach the chosen people the way of salvation. Whilst "He was seen upon earth and conversed with men,"* His own divine lips uttered the words of eternal life. Since His Ascension, the Catholic Church discharges this office to mankind ; and if I had not her to look to, I should need again Jesus Himself to teach, to preach, to decide with infallible authority ; or should be left hopelessly adrift in all that concerns my salvation.

True it is we possess the Holy Scriptures, and their authority is, in the highest degree, exalted and venerable. But this production of divine inspiration has no power to protect itself against faulty interpretations. It cannot prevent itself from being explained in various senses, and turned in any direction men please. It cannot cry out against those who pervert it. Some other authority, then, exterior to Scripture, was necessary ; and this we find in the Church and her sacred Traditions. What peace, what security, is thus imparted to my whole life ! The moment I have ascertained that there exists upon earth an infallible authority based on the divine promises, and that the Church is its depository, all incertitude, all anxiety, depart. I have only to hear her voice and to obey. Safe as the lamb within its fold, I have no need to go in search of distant or forbidden pastures. Never can heresy break into my retreat ; never can false teaching poison my cup ; for the Church is continually on the watch, and in her hand is the sword of the

* Bar. iii. 38.

Spirit ready drawn against secret or open enemy. For me, as a child of the Church, large stores of learning are not a requisite. Enough that I be faithful to her injunctions. It is for her to investigate, to define, to decide. My sole affair, as one intimately conscious of what the Church is, and how great the promises made her by her divine Lord—promises in which He cannot fail without denying Himself*—my sole affair is, to receive with loving veneration the least word that falls from her lips, and in all matters on which she gives her decision, to be prepared to exclaim with her greatest doctor and humblest child, “Rome has spoken: The cause is at an end.”†

THIRD MEDITATION.

Unhappiness of those who admit no principle of authority.

And here that I may better appreciate my happiness, let me take a glance at those who, ignoring the Church of God, and trusting to their own strength, seek, it may be, salvation, but by a path which too often terminates in an abyss of misery.

There are those, “neither prophets nor sons of prophets,”‡ who yielding to an infatuated enthusiasm, admit of no law but their own private

inspirations. But what is their warrant for this? Surely not the Gospel; for so far from leaving men to the suggestions of their own spirit, our Lord expressly says to the Apostles, "Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."* "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned."† In like manner St. Paul declares that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ;"‡ and again, "Though we or an angel from Heaven preach a Gospel to you beside that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema;"§ and St. John, "Dearly beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."|| No! let us be assured, private inspirations, such as we speak of, are no safe guide to the soul. There is in them nothing of that clearness and security which pertains to a rule of faith. Without a manifest proof that they come from God they can serve no good end; and such a proof it would be absurd to ask of those who deny the Church, and boast of having no guide but themselves. How can it be shown that they are not trying to impose on me, or at least are not themselves imposed upon by their own imaginations? Even admitting the supernatural character of the revelation which they profess to have

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† Mark xvi. 16.

‡ Rom. x. 17.

§ Gal. i. 8.

|| I John iv. 1.

received, how am I to know certainly and infallibly that it comes from God, and not from an Angel of darkness lying in wait to deceive?

Others there are in the opposite extreme, who profess to walk by pure reason. God forbid I should speak contemptuously of a light which He has Himself kindled within us, to be, in its due place, the guide of our path. Immense and inappreciable are the services of reason, not only in the natural order, but, as apprehending the grounds of faith, in the spiritual also. But to expect from reason what reason cannot give—to contemplate attaining by its instrumentality the elucidation of mysteries which lie totally beyond its limit, is the height of folly, as testified by universal experience. Witness the history of our later rationalists whose fatal doctrines have exercised so great an influence. The moment they renounced faith in order to crown and deify reason, all things lost their stability and began to swim and waver before them. Their view became obscured, their feet unsteady. The basis of their lives was gone. So long as their reasoning faculty kept within its own tether, it was clear, it was vigorous, it was sound. But no sooner had it misconstrued its powers, and broken its natural bounds; no sooner had it taken upon itself a mission which God has reserved for faith; than it became sceptical of the commonest truths—doubted even itself—and reeling like a drunken man, was lost in the perplexities of an Egyptian darkness.

Both reason and faith are alike from God.

How perverse then to adhere to natural reason only, when a supernatural gift is offered us in addition! We must take man as he is. Had God so willed, reason alone might have sufficed for all our requirements; but she had need, as St. Augustine observes, to be humbled, and faith was to be the instrument of her humiliation.

Nor let it be said that faith therefore degrades a man. On the contrary, it ennobles him, and places him on a higher and securer elevation than before. The Church, in imposing her divine authority, has no intention to obstruct the human intellect in its multifold exercise. Her sole desire is to deliver minds from the empire of darkness, and from the most terrific of uncertainties. Reason, supported by faith, may advance where she will, without fear or impediment; may in perfect safety traverse this immense universe, so bountifully "delivered over to her study;"* may measure its width and height, and sound its unspeakable depths. Whatever is discoverable within her own sphere, discover she may, without the least hindrance on the part of faith, nay, rather with its willing aid; but where it would be perilous, where it would be mad for her to advance further, there faith, watching, purifying, enlightening, arrests her course.

Faith does more. There exists in the supernatural order, to say nothing of the natural, a vast body of most momentous truths, to which reason, by its own powers, can never attain. These truths faith discovers to her with infallible

* Eccles. iii. 11.

accuracy; and hence the Catholic, so far from being debarred from intellectual enjoyment, possesses far more abundant materials for it than others who have not the faith. Yes, O my God, Thy Holy Church supplies us with sublime and positive solutions on countless questions respecting Thy own infinite self—respecting the soul and its destinies—respecting the true worship to be rendered Thee, and the conditions of our reconciliation and union with Thee. Whereas, destitute of this support, natural reason does but vainly torture itself, and stammer forth a medley of truth and falsity on the things of another life.

What a curious collection might be made, both from ancient and modern history, of instances ludicrous if they were not so impious, exhibiting the fatuity with which the human mind is smitten the instant it sets about inventing a religion. Witness the Roman Emperors making themselves the objects of divine worship, and martyring the Christians for refusing it them. Witness Mahomet, with his astounding pretensions, and a life that from first to last was one great abomination. Witness the French philosophers who, in the last century, framed a new religion of nature, in which the very existence of God was ignored; or, witness again, in our time, the rise of the Mormonites in America. Oh, how precious, how venerable, does the authority of the Church appear beside portents such as these!

There is another class of thinkers, who might at first sight seem nearer the truth. They profess to hold the Bible, and the Bible alone, as

their religion; and deem that, secure on this foundation, they can afford to dispense with the Church. But what a mistake is here! Our separated brethren forget that it is not the Bible, but the Church, that is called by St. Paul "the pillar and ground of the truth."* Holy Scripture, it is true, contains the Christian code, but who does not know that every law needs to be duly interpreted and applied—needs a tribunal to which recurrence may be had when desirable? Without this security a written code, even of divine authority, must become virtually a dead letter, which individuals, following their private judgment, will abuse to their own extreme injury.

The contradictions and inconsistencies that, in Protestant hands, have issued out of this theory of "the Bible and the Bible alone," are proof enough of its extravagance. Thus, for instance, as regards our Lord's solemn words employed in the institution of the Eucharist, we have, on the one side, the disciple of Luther kneeling down and adoring what he conceives to be the presence of our Lord in the sacred elements; on the other, we have the follower of Calvin obstinately persisting that this presence is simply figurative. Between interpretations thus diametrically opposed, how is the thoughtful Protestant to decide? Is it not obvious that, for Christ to say, "This is My body,"† and for the Evangelists to record his words in writing, was not all that human infir-

* 1 Tim. iii. 15.

† Matt. xxvi. 26.

mity needed? It needed also a living infallible voice to fix the sense of these words, and impress it perpetually on mankind.

Be 'Thou glorified for ever, O Jesus my Saviour and my God, for having given Thy Church this power of teaching and directing without possibility of error. Thine own authority it is that we reverence in hers. If I believe the Church without question, it is because He who guides her is above all question. I know, O my adorable Master, Thou hast said, "search the Scriptures;"* and this the Catholic does, not however, like the Protestant, in order to acquire certainty, but to increase his devotion and his love. To acquire certainty, the voice of the Church is all that he needs, as, in fact, before the Gospels or Epistles were composed, the early Christians needed no more. Enough for them as for us, Thy eternally abiding promise to Thy Apostles and their successors through all time, (and I know it no less surely from Tradition than from the Gospels themselves), "He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me."† "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."‡

Were it possible for the Church of the present day to fail in doctrine, to what purpose Christ's presence within her? And if, as they say, He has departed from her, what then becomes of His promise to be with her all days even to the end?

* John v. 39.

† Luke x. 16.

‡ Matt. xxviii. 20.

Let heretics escape from this dilemma, as they best may; nay rather let them not strive to escape, but allow themselves to be convinced, as we Catholics are, that they cannot ignore the authority of the Church without at the same time disowning our Lord Himself.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

Where, within the Church, the great principle of authority resides.

Already, in a former chapter, we have glanced at the secret of Catholic unity, and have seen that our happiness and stability as Christians are bound up with the Holy See of St. Peter. Yet the subject is one so full of consolation and enlightenment, that it is a pleasure to find the natural course of our meditations bringing it again before us.

The Holy Gospels exhibit to us our Lord Himself as constituting St. Peter the depositary of that authority which we have seen to be so necessary for the Church. "Thou art Peter," He says, "and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall

be loosed also in heaven.”* “Thou being converted, confirm thy brethren.” † “Feed My lambs, feed My sheep.” ‡ Such are the words, full of divine import, in which, according to all tradition, this sublime jurisdiction is given to the Prince of the Apostles.

But these privileges, Lord, thus largely bestowed by Thy hand, are they to terminate with the death of Peter? No. Most assuredly there must be one to inherit them; one who may continue in the Church that function which St. Peter discharged while living, and to whom it shall pertain to be ever on the watch, and never to suffer the gates of hell to prevail against her. Who shall this inheritor be? He shall be the bishop who succeeded St. Peter, not in the See of Antioch, where he was but a sojourner, but in the great See of Rome—that see which he filled for so many years, and of which he was in occupation at his death. And as the Church must last to the consummation of the world, it follows that, all the ages down, the Roman See must possess a successor of St. Peter; one who shall, so to say, perpetuate him in the Church, and enjoy his privilege of infallibility, whenever he formally enunciates the Christian doctrine from that pontifical chair, where falsehood can never take her seat. Such has been the unchanging belief of all the Christian centuries. However different, in age, character, genius, fortune, or country, the

* Matt. xvi. 18.

† Luke xxii. 32.

‡ John xxi. 15.

Bishops of Rome may have been, the Church has always heard St. Peter's voice in theirs; and in her General Councils, has ever repeated with the Fathers of Chalcedon and Constantinople: "It is Peter who has spoken by the mouth of God;" "It is Peter who has spoken by the mouth of the Pope." Never through all history have the faithful turned their eyes elsewhere than to Rome, when a decision in faith or morals was in question. In all religious controversies we find the final appeal addressed, not to Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, or Ephesus, but to Rome. Nor can we doubt but that this uniform action on the part of the Church is the true interpretation of our Lord's will in the matter. It cannot be imagined that He would permit that Church of His love, with which He is "all days," to be impelled by a false instinct. If, then, she has perpetually betaken herself to Rome, as the source of dogmatic truth, it is because at Rome it is her duty to seek for it, because at Rome it is infallibly to be found.

O adorable Redeemer, how my soul is fired with loving admiration, at the august form in which thou presentest to us this great principle of religious authority! Thou hast set it before our eyes invested with all majesty and honour. And not only so; but Thou hast also willed that its appointed source and centre should be on all occasions, and with the utmost facility, accessible. Thou hast, so to say, popularized this great gift. If the whole Church were obliged to meet in solemn council every time it pleased an heretical

teacher to rise up and utter some blasphemous formula against revealed truth, what would become of her children? False principles would have time to "spread like a cancer,"* and ravage all society before their remedy could be applied. But, thanks, Lord, to Thy forecasting goodness, there is an ever ready oracle in the eternal city; it is enough to notify the evil to the Successor of St. Peter, and his powerful arm can at once arrest its progress, and restore the faithful to their wonted security.

O my God, I am bound to bless Thee, and I do bless Thee for this grace; and as, with regard to baptism, it is my joy to think Thou hast chosen for its matter an element so ready at hand; so I exult in the reflection that the depositary of Thy divine authority is a simple mortal man, who, with all his dignity, is still most easily approachable, the servant of the servants of God! †

Next in consideration to that august Pontiff, who presides over the Church as its sovereign Head, we must not forget the venerable Episcopate throughout the world, so intimately united with Him, and in their own measure, successors of the Apostles also. They, too, have their promise of infallibility, and the decisions of General Councils are to the faithful as the voice of God Himself. True it is, as we have observed above, there is at all times open to the Church an infallible tribunal in the Holy See alone; nevertheless,

* 2 Tim. ii. 17.

† Servus servorum Dei.

these magnificent assemblages of bishops from all parts of Christendom have borne wonderful fruit to Christianity in their day. The very spectacle of them has sufficed to smite heretics with awe, while it encouraged the faithful by exhibiting to the eye, on so grand a scale, the union of Christ's mystical Body with its earthly Head. For the Pope, we must ever remember, forms essentially a constituent element in every General Council. St. Peter, over and above the special promise made to himself and his successors, is included again in the general declaration made to all the Apostles. His successors preside by divine right over every General Council; nor indeed can a Council be esteemed as General without his solemn ratification.

Oh how I rejoice to behold the Holy Father and the sacred Episcopate thus united. Never either in my thoughts or in my affections will I separate them. Never will I waste time and trouble in questions with which some persons perplex themselves, and which can never lead to any practical result; as, for instance, which is the greatest, the Pope or a General Council? or, by whom is the Pope to be set right if he fall into error? Such cases as these, I intimately feel, are simply illusory, and the attempt to resolve them manifests an imperfect estimate of Christ's promise to His Church and of the solicitude of His paternal providence. The fact that so many ages have already passed, in all which time, even under the most deplorable circumstances, the supposed difficulty has never once occurred, is surely suffi-

cient evidence that our Lord will never be wanting to His Church, and that He will supply all that is needful for the maintenance of that perfect union between His mystical Body and its earthly Head, which is the mutual strength of each. Instead, therefore, of making purely ideal suppositions, it is enough for me simply to ask, Who holds with St. Peter? For where Peter is, there, in the words of St. Ambrose, is the Catholic Church, and there with her, am I.

The thoughts which have just engaged us, and in which the faithful soul ever finds a continually growing delight, have been set forth, to the whole Christian world, with wonderful unction by the present Successor of St. Peter—the immortal Pius the Ninth. “God Himself,” he says, in a late encyclical, “has established a living authority to teach and uphold the legitimate sense of divine Revelation, and to terminate, by an infallible decision, all controversies in matters of faith and morals; in order that the faithful may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine, or entangled in the mazes of error by the perversity of men that lie in wait to deceive. Now this living and infallible authority exists, and exists solely, in that Church, which Christ has built upon Peter, who is the Prince, Head, and Pastor of all the Christian people, and whose faith, He has promised, shall never fail,—in that Church, in which, from St. Peter, there has been an uninterrupted succession of Pontiffs, in possession of his chair, as inheritors and maintainers of his doctrine, jurisdiction, and privileges. And since, where Peter is, there is the Church; and whereas God

speaks to us by the Roman Pontiff; and whereas Peter ever lives in his successors, judges in their person, and, by them propounds the truth to all who seek it;—hence the necessity of interpreting the word of God in that sense in which it is understood, and has ever been understood by this See of Blessed Peter, which, as mother and mistress of all the Churches, has always preserved pure and inviolate the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and has taught the same to the Faithful, setting forth to all men the way of salvation, of instruction, and of truth incorrupt. This is that supreme Church to which because of its pre-eminence the faithful of all countries must have recourse, and with which whosoever refuseth to gather is thereby convicted of scattering.”

FIFTH MEDITATION.

The Catholic Church the preserver of morality.

As the walls and arches of a building rest upon the foundations, so morality upon belief. Thus, in maintaining the true faith, Holy Church has indirectly upheld the cause of good morals also, in addition to the direct influence which she has never failed to exercise. How grateful ought society to be for this incalculable aid!

The infidel philosophers, who, as an offset to their hatred of all dogmatic truth, affect a high respect for morality, including that of the Gospel

itself; and who think to supply for the absence of faith, by introducing in its stead those great principles of justice, prudence, and other virtues, which have been transmitted from the old Pagan times—these writers assume an apparent ignorance of the fact, that society owes to the vigilant care of the Church all that remains to it of any worth from this ancient moral code. Finding in Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and other pagan authors, numerous social and political maxims, indicative of the highest wisdom, they would wish to give the whole credit of whatever useful influence these principles now exert on society, to men who were strangers to Christianity. But they deceive themselves. It is to the Church of God that this honour must be ascribed. The illustrious philosophers of antiquity having committed to writing those precious maxims of wisdom which, for the most part, they had inherited from an earlier and purer age, went their way one by one. In process of time the schools which they had formed became extinct. Their works perished, or became so rare and inaccessible to the mass of men, that they exercised the very feeblest effect on the public at large. It was left to the Catholic Church to restore their vitality, and to bring them into action on the new society that sprang up from amid the ruins of the old Roman empire. As the bird of the desert deposits in the sand the egg which not her own fostering care but the beneficent luminary of day will bring to maturity, so they departed leaving these germs of great ideas to be developed in a later age, by a more potent

influence. They departed. They went their way. They slept their sleep with kings and princes of the earth,* fast folded in the tomb. But meanwhile the Church, that imperishable mother, that watchful sentinel of Israel who neither slumbers nor sleeps, was busy at her work, and by the loving warmth of her active and persevering zeal threw open to the world those treasures of ancient wisdom; while at the same time, by admitting them into her moral theology, she made them for ever her own.

But, O holy Church of the living God, if thou hast taken such care of the moral truths which have fallen, so to say, in thy way, what solicitude hast thou not shown in preserving that morality which is especially thine, the morality of the Gospel!—a morality truly divine, since it has God incarnate for its author—a morality priceless in its worth and dignity, since it is the fruit of the precious blood—a morality which has remoulded mankind and introduced a second creation.

This morality so sublime, which unites man with God and with his fellow-man by the closest of bonds—which keeps a watch over, and purifies every least desire of the heart—which honours virginity, sanctifies marriage, directs the family and society, multiplies our joys, assuages our miseries—what would have become of it, O Church of God, in any other hands but thine?

What would it have become under the hands of heretics ancient or modern; of the Manicheans

* Job. iii. 13.

for instance, or the Waldenses, whose abominable doctrines the pen refuses to trace; of the Soci-nians, who unblushingly announced the compatibility of the worst actions, if not habitual, with a state of salvation; or of countless other sects, the spawn of the Reformation, some of which, through their own corruption, others through sheer powerlessness, have sanctioned the commission of all that the vilest passions can inspire? But happily thou wast there, O Holy Church, battling against all this disorder, that truth and justice might still have place on earth. Age after age didst thou confront the powers of the world announcing, like John the Baptist before Herod, "This is not lawful for thee."* Never didst thou shrink from this lofty duty; and in order to fulfil it, Oh! what odium wast thou obliged to brave! What assaults didst thou draw upon thyself! What persecutions didst thou endure! How often didst thou seem to be wasting thy strength in fruitless efforts, and vainly opposing a barrier against the torrent of human crime! Yet it was something even to give warning of the evil, and to prevent men from falling asleep on the brink of the precipice.

Then, again, there was the relaxation which too indulgent theorists of thine own would have introduced into morality. Under the pretext of rendering admission to Heaven less difficult, these writers so widened its entrance in their mistaken conceptions, as to destroy all resemblance to "the narrow gate of the Gospel."† Oh! what labour was

* Matt. xiv. 14.

† Matt. vii. 14.

thine in rectifying their error! What prudence, what firmness did it demand! Yet the work was done, and done unflinchingly; and never was a proposition put forward, tending to the injury of morals, or a lowering of principles, but it was presently branded with thy condemnation.

And now, looking especially to our own times, what has not the Catholic Church effected on the side of morality? The present century opened, throughout Christendom, with a veritable conspiracy against all justice and purity. Writers of great talent, but still greater depravity, made unheard-of efforts to lead public opinion astray by "calling evil good and light darkness."* Innumerable works were poured forth in every department of literature, with the professed object of vilifying states of life which God has pronounced holy, and of justifying the most abject vices. What would have become of morality—what would have become of all sound feeling in society, if these destructive writers had been permitted to prevail altogether? But, O holy Church of God, in proportion as these enemies sowed tares, thou wast present scattering thy good seed. Thy sovereign Pontiffs—thy Bishops—thy Priests—thy zealous laity—ceased not to instil the love of order and virtue into the hearts of a generation which the foes of Christ would have steeped in all impiety. And thanks to thy voice always eloquent and indefatigable, morality was again saved from extinction.

Doubtless, as in the past and present, so, too,

* Is. v. 20.

in the future, the Church will ever find opponents. Ever will she have to encounter men, and classes of men, abandoned to their passions, and who prefer to corrupt the law rather than purify their conscience. Ever, too, there will be that passive obstruction presented by the lukewarm and faint-hearted, to whom everything appears impossible; and who shrink through very cowardice from manfully bearing the Christian yoke. But the Church, setting before them the strength that comes of God's grace, will never cease her efforts to bring back these unhappy souls to that inflexible rule of duty against which, in St. Augustine's words, those who refuse submission must soon or late be dashed to pieces. And thus she will be to all future times the incorruptible guardian of that pure Gospel morality, whose divine odours, thanks to her past solicitude, we still breathe amidst the defilements of a polluted world.

SIXTH MEDITATION.

Obedience to the divine law facilitated by the precepts of the Church.

Oh how exalted are the thoughts of God above those of men, and how deplorably mistaken are they, who, with such little examination, pronounce upon matters of religion, and will only see a burden where they should be grateful for a benefit!

Among the benefits of the Catholic Church to mankind, it is by no means the least, that in order to keep the divine law before our minds, and facilitate its practice, she has superadded precepts of her own.

The infidel and heretic reproach her with descending to minutiae, with tyrannizing over consciences, and binding on the shoulders of her children burdens too heavy for them to bear. From the elevation of their vain and pretentious independence, they smile with pity at the sight of her fasts and abstinences, and ask themselves how any authority really in earnest can attach importance to such trivialities.

But it must be remembered, the Church is not simply an authority: she is a mother also; and no mother can be too careful in all that affects the health and growth of her child. God has given us laws; and He is a Being whose will cannot be ignored with impunity. How great were our danger, if, amidst worldly affairs, the entanglements of life, and delusive pleasures, we forgot or neglected the divine law! Against this peril the Church has provided, by establishing certain subsidiary Precepts, and the service which she thus renders her children is beyond all calculation. Let us consider some instances.

The Lord of all, for example, has commanded us to consecrate to Him one day in the week. What more just or reasonable? Six days are allowed us for supplying our temporal necessities. It is but equitable that a seventh should be set apart for God and for our spiritual

interests. But if the matter is simply left to individuals; if there is no exterior rule defining and enjoining the duties of the day; it will either glide past us without notice, or at least we shall be at a loss to know whether we have devoted a sufficient portion of it to its proper object

Come, then, O Holy Church, dear mother of our souls, and add thy own Precept to the commandment of the great God. Declare what we must do—what act of homage is in thy judgment the most excellent, the most worthy of God that we can offer on this day. Thou decidest unhesitatingly. The Sacrifice of the Mass, beyond a doubt, surpasses all other religious acts in its pre-eminent worth and dignity. Impose on us, then, O Holy Church, the obligation of assisting at it. This will thus become the great duty of the day, an embarrassing one perhaps at times, but always dear and sacred; and our souls will be comforted and tranquillized when we have conscientiously fulfilled it. Doubtless it will be our joy to go beyond this, to do for God more than is of absolute obligation, and to multiply our exercises of piety on the Lord's day; but when, from circumstances, we can do no more, we shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that in fulfilling what the Church prescribes we have done sufficient.

So, too, with the Blessed Eucharist. Our Saviour, in instituting this great Sacrament of love, laid indirectly upon His children the duty of holy communion. But He has gone beyond this. He has positively commanded it. "Amen! Amen! I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son

of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.”* The whole chapter, from which these words are taken, is replete with proofs that our spiritual life must be drawn from this sacred fountain; and that without the Holy Eucharist the soul languishes and dies.

But, alas! this Sacrament so lifegiving, so needful, is it not too often neglected by unthinking man? Is our Lord sufficiently loved and sought in it? The impenetrable veil which there shrouds the blaze of His glory—do we not too frequently allow it to obscure in our minds the very idea of His presence? And notwithstanding the evident intention of our Saviour, notwithstanding His express words, should we not come at last, the most of us, to neglect the great duty of communion altogether, unless Holy Church drew nigh with her Precept of annual reception, to waken us from our supineness, and to constrain us not to die? It is too true that even with this precept, there is still a deplorable amount of negligence under this head; what would then be the case if we were entirely abandoned to ourselves—if to bring Christians to the holy Table, there were no other inducement but that spiritual hunger which is so feeble in the best of us? How fortunate, then, for us, is the tender solicitude of the Church in not allowing us to fall asleep in our pilgrimage, but incessantly repeating in our ears, as the angel to Elias,—“Arise, eat, for thou hast yet a great way to go.” † There

* John vi. 54.

† 3 Kings xix. 7.

may be those of her children to whom this repetition is a vexation and weariness, but this only shows how much they stand in need of it; and they themselves, on recovering from their torpor, will be the first to bless that watchful mother who recalls them so perseveringly to the source of life.

Penance, again! Who knows not its vast importance, its absolute necessity? At the Gospel dawn it constituted the one solemn cry of St. John the Baptist. Our Lord constantly preaches it. "Repent," He says, "and believe the Gospel."* "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish."† The Apostles, faithful observers of their Master, are found constantly exhorting their hearers "to do penance and turn to God."‡ There is no injunction in the Holy Scriptures more clear and positive. But, alas! our fallen nature rebels and rises up in all its force against this salutary teaching of the Gospel. Sensuality, dissipation, business, the love of the world, evil example, involve the thoughtless Christian, and bear him far away from this sole plank of refuge for sinners after the shipwreck of their first innocence. O Church of God, lift up then thy voice, and recall thy children to that path, which, thorny though it be, is the only one that can bring them back to heaven. Do violence to our sloth. Deal with us as the loving mother who constrains her sick child to take the medicine, which in his ignorance he pushes from him because

* Mark i. 15.

† Luke xlii. 3.

‡ Acts xxvi. 20.

of its bitterness. Oblige us, O Holy Church, to do penance. Speak aloud and spare not; for if thy voice be not heard we shall become oblivious of it, and all sense of our true state will be lost. It is lost already to the heretical communions which have separated from thee and obey not thy law; and to those of thy own children who treat thee as an alien, and have no care of thy precepts. Where is their denial of self, where their spirit of mortification, wherein with St. Paul and the Saints do they crucify their flesh?* Alas! Penance for them has no existence, and the injunctions of the Gospel under this head are to their minds an utter unreality.

How happy, then is the faithful Catholic, finding, as he does, in the Precepts of the Church an obligation to this great duty. The precepts which bear upon penance and works of penance, are, indeed, few enough; simply annual confession, and the observance of certain fasts and abstinences. Nevertheless, they are sufficient to impose on a man the greatest of all sacrifices, that of his own liberty. I comprehend, dearest Lord, the merit of this obedience. I measure it, not precisely by the less or greater amount of penitential work, but by the abnegation of the will, by its un murmuring subjection of itself to Thy Church. "Why have we fasted and thou hast not regarded?" cried the Jews of old. "Why have we humbled our souls and Thou hast not taken notice?" And God replies, "Behold in the day of your fast your

* Gal. v. 24.

own will is found."* This reproach affects not the true Catholic. In fasting he but fulfils the law of the Church, and submits his will to hers.

But what no less wins my admiration is to see Holy Church, with all her strictness, mitigating, nevertheless, and even altogether, suspending her laws when the infirmity of her children calls for it. Thy own divine Law, O my God, admits not of dispensation, and when its observance presents an insurmountable difficulty, we must be prepared rather to die than violate it, even as Thy holy martyrs did before us. Thy greatness, Thy goodness, well deserve of us such a sacrifice. Not so with the precepts of the Church. Provided the violation of them is not demanded of us in contempt of religion, in which case also we must be prepared to die rather than disobey them, this indulgent mother recedes, in circumstances of difficulty, from her right, and does not oblige us to obedience under pain of sin.

Nor let it be said, in conclusion, that the Church has multiplied her laws beyond reason, and that instead of helping our infirmity she weighs it down under a number of ordinances, which almost bring back the old Jewish yoke. Far otherwise. The actual Precepts of the Church binding upon Christians do not exceed six at most, namely—to keep the holydays of obligation, to hear Mass on Sundays and Festivals, to observe fast and abstinence, to go to confession at least annually, to receive the Blessed Sacrament at Easter or there-

abouts, and not to marry within the forbidden degrees.

As to the various rules of religious bodies, and the ordinances comprised in the Decrees of Councils and books of Canon Law; they are either pious regulations which do not oblige under pain of sin—or laws whose obligation is conditional upon the voluntary engagement of individuals, as for instance that of celibacy—or rules of procedure in ecclesiastical courts—or censures of different kinds, absolutely necessary for the maintenance of discipline in the Church.

How different this from the ceremonial Law imposed on the individual Jew, with its vast body of observances obligatory upon all without exception, down to the minutest details! And how unjust they who accuse the Church of bringing mankind again into a state of Judaism, when a moment's comparison between the two systems, evinces them, notwithstanding a partial analogy, to be totally dissimilar in practice—the one tending to a legal bondage, the other to the utmost amount of spiritual liberty that is consistent with the true life and happiness of the children of God.

SEVENTH MEDITATION.

The Church in her Pastoral Ministry.

The pastoral ministry is of divine institution, "Feed my lambs: Feed my sheep,"* are our Lord's words to St. Peter; and St. Paul declares that "the Holy Ghost has placed Bishops to rule the Church of God."† The Christian Hierarchy then is of God; and He perpetuates it by the instrumentality of His Church. She it is who, in obedience to His will, selects her pastors, and prepares them with infinite pains for the saving of souls. By them she brings us forth to Christ. By them she maintains in us the life of grace, "that the man of God may be perfect, furnished unto every good work."‡ By them she teaches us what we are bound to believe, to do, and to avoid, if we desire to walk securely in the path of salvation.

And first, in the very centre of Catholicism she maintains for us a Sovereign Pontiff and common Father of the Faithful; who cannot, indeed, know each of his sheep individually by name, but can embrace them all in his affection and prayers; and can reach them with his instructions by the aid of other pastors nearer at hand, who are, so to say, his eyes and hands.

Who can express with what solicitous precau-

* John xxi, 15.

† Acts xx. 28.

‡ 11 Tim. iii. 17.

tions the Church selects and elevates to his awful dignity the individual who is destined to comprehend the whole flock of Christ under his pastoral charge? Sometimes she takes him from a lowly station, knowing that the Apostles were such themselves, and because after the pattern of her divine Founder she is no respecter of persons and looks only to the interests of souls. At other times she fixes on some great one of the earth, the heir of a noble name, and a long line of honours. Thus selected, on the ground especially of his possessing that charity, devotion, and courage combined, which the successor of St. Peter so pre-eminently needs, she presents him formally to her children. She elevates him. She crowns him with solemn rite and ceremony, omitting nothing that may serve to impress upon his mind, amidst a greatness which has no parallel upon earth, the fact that he is still the servant of the servants of God.

If up to this time he was in no more than minor orders she makes him pass in one day through all the degrees of ordination. If, however, he is already clothed with the Episcopal character, she has nothing further to give him, for his jurisdiction he receives direct from God. But he will learn from her how to use this transcendent authority; and she will set before him the examples of her Saints and her own sacred laws, to be an exterior light, in addition to that interior illumination which the Holy Ghost will not fail to supply.

O Christian, how canst thou avoid loving that

Holy Church which is thus provident in thy behalf? Nor is this all. She again it is who maintains in closer approximation to thee another Pastor, to provide for thy spiritual necessities by his constant supervision, whence indeed his title of Bishop. This ministry is not simply a creation of ecclesiastical law. It exists by divine right. The chief pastor of every diocese is, in his measure, a successor of the Apostles, and constitutes with the rest one episcopate. And thus it comes to pass that the immense flock of Christ is divided amongst many without being dismembered or disunited. Parted by seas and continents, and countless geographical divisions, it still remains everywhere one, and enjoys, in all its portions, the shepherd's constant care.

O how truly august is this ministry of Bishops! To have the charge and regulation of divine worship—to be the defenders of religion against all assailers—to preserve the faith intact—to see that the Sacraments are administered suitably to their dignity—to examine and denounce dangerous books—to preach the whole truth of God to the faithful both by word and example, enlightening them with doctrine and supplying a perfect rule of life and conduct—all this and far more belongs to the work of a Bishop, as the Church ceases not to remind him whom she calls to this office.

His consecration she invests with high solemnities expressive of this sublime ministry. She might have contented herself with the simple imposition of hands, in which, agreeably with the

practice of Christian antiquity, the principal and incontestable matter of ordination would seem to reside. But no. This is too little for her anxious solicitude. She desires by special and significant rites to set before her Bishop from the first all the duties he owes his flock, and for which he must give account. Hence the book of the holy Gospels placed on his head, implying that the power committed to him is not his own, wherewith to domineer at will, but is to be used in subjection to the law of Christ. Hence that mystical ring, incessantly recalling the close union that should subsist between him and the diocese which he has espoused; and with its signet reminding him, at the same time, that he is the depository of the divine mysteries. Hence the pastoral crozier, which, while it marks his pre-eminence, typifies also his obligation, as shepherd, of guiding the strong, sustaining the weak, correcting sinners, and reclaiming those who have gone astray. Hence that solemn and abundant anointing, emblematic of the divine grace, which not only must fill his own soul, but must overflow from it on all around, diffusing amongst his people the sweet odours of Christ. Finally, in order that the impression of these eloquent ceremonies may not fade away, the Church encourages her Bishops in keeping the anniversary day of their consecration with certain special observances—a custom which inherited from the ages of the faith has been cherished by the saintliest of her Pontiffs.

Listen to the admirable words in which Holy Church addresses her Bishop elect. “Know,”

she says, in substance, "that thou art about to take on thee a great burden, a great work, the government of souls. Carefully guard the purity of the Faith. Apply thyself to Holy Scripture. Observe the traditions of the Fathers. Be obedient to the Apostolic See. Be chaste, sober, humble, patient, and avoid all scandal. Keep thyself free from worldly engagements; have a care of thy flock; assist the poor, the stranger, and all that are in need."

Then, lest, as time goes on, he should fail in usefulness to his flock for want of due acquaintance with its necessities; she commands him to make periodical visitations of his diocese. "Be diligent," she says, "to know the countenance of thy herds, and consider thy flocks; for power shall come to an end, but thy crown shall be from generation to generation."*

His visitation concluded, she would have him communicate its results to the Sovereign Pontiff; and at certain intervals she enjoins him to present himself at Rome, in person, there to visit the tombs of the Apostles, and to confer with the successor of St. Peter, on the best means of maintaining and increasing religion in his diocese.

O my God, how touching is the solicitude of Thy Church in behalf of her children, and how they would bless her, did they but fully comprehend the secrets of her ineffable charity!

But this is not all. To these two pastors—the Sovereign Pontiff and the Bishop—she adds yet another, still nearer to the sheep, living in fact in

* Prov. xxvii. 23.

the midst of them—the priest of the parish or mission, as the case may be. Consider well his office and dignity. The character with which ordination has stamped him is truly divine. His power comes from on high. He is ambassador from God to man, and invested as such with an authority altogether supernatural.

Here again how careful is Holy Church in selecting and preparing her sacred ministers! Remembering those words of the Apostle,—“Impose not thy hands lightly on any man;” * what loving prudence has she shown in providing for the priests of her choice those homes of piety, the ecclesiastical seminaries, in which from their youth upwards, they may be educated not only in secular knowledge, but in all sacerdotal virtues and acquirements. There it is that under the direction of able and zealous masters of Israel, and surrounded by the attractive examples of numerous fervent companions, the youthful Levite is initiated in that special and sublime science which has for its end the glory of God and salvation of souls—Catholic Theology! There it is that, by successive steps, and due intervals of trial, he passes through the minor orders, the subdiaconate, and diaconate, on to the transcendent dignity of priesthood. What careful examinations, what solemn warnings attend each step of his course! How anxiously the great Mother strives to secure for her work, men of God, true members of Christ, equipped at all points for their task. And in all these efforts,

* 1 Tim. v. 22.

what is her one object but the welfare of souls? To offer the Sacred Victim—to baptize—to absolve—to preach—to rule the flock—these are the functions which she sets before her priest as his main work, and in which she aims at making him perfect; and is there one of them that is not for our sakes?

O Christian soul, love, then, her who provides for thee such powerful aids to thy salvation. Think often of thy three spiritual fathers, the Pope, the Bishop, the Priest, through whom, as by a golden chain, thou art linked with God! And forget not that the prayers which they make for thee—their tears for thy sins—their manifold instructions, and benedictions—all their labours on thy behalf—are the fruit of that untiring care which Holy Church takes in forming them for thy service, and imbuing their hearts with the ardent desire of thy happiness.

CHAPTER V.

SERVICES RENDERED BY THE CHURCH TO MANKIND
IN THE SPIRITUAL ORDER—CONTINUED.

FIRST MEDITATION.

*The Church, as preserving to us the Sacraments
and Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.*

O my God, well do I know that human nature apart from Thy grace is weak indeed. I have experienced in myself, I have witnessed in others, its manifold infirmity. Left to its own strength, it can do nothing to merit salvation. Of ourselves we are nought, we are less than nought, for we are mere guilt and misery. But Thy grace is sufficient for us, and with its assistance we can obtain justification, and can become capable of many good works.

This grace our Lord has merited for us by His death on the cross; and that which we lost in Adam, and which of ourselves we could never have regained, is made ours in Him. O transcendent gift of love! What strength do I derive from it both to will and to perform. Nay, even of those morally good actions, which in themselves would have been without value for

my salvation, how many acquire thereby a meritorious power and an eternal recompense!

But, here, can I forget that this divine gift of grace, this sacred element of a new life, comes to us chiefly through the hands of Holy Church? It is true, God does not confine Himself in the distribution of it to any positive law. His goodness overflows all bounds. In every quarter of the world, among heretics, Pagans, Mahometans, His preventing and assisting inspirations are at work in the hearts of His creatures. But that habitual, that sanctifying grace, which, as a gift of God to the soul, justifies it, abides in it, makes it pleasing to Him, and capable of meriting unto eternal life—how rare of attainment must it be under such circumstances! God indeed can work miracles, and justify whom He will; but in the ordinary course of His providence the grace of justification comes to man through the instrumentality of the Sacraments, and the Sacraments come to him through Holy Church. Nay, by means of the Sacraments, not only is this habitual grace established in the soul, and where lost regained; but also through them we receive a large portion of our actual graces, each Sacrament bringing with it a peculiar efficacious aid of its own.

Less help than this, O my God, would not have sufficed for our necessity. We needed some *opus operatum* in our favour. We needed that from some source, not in ourselves nor of ourselves, there should be infused into us a divine strength. How then can we thank Thee enough

for having bestowed upon us, through Thy Church, the Seven Sacraments, which act as real efficient causes of grace to our souls, no less than as its mystical signs!

And first in Baptism, Thou makest us Thy children; cleansest us from sin, original and actual; impartest to us the grace of regeneration, and the germs of every virtue necessary for our salvation. After awhile comes Confirmation, in which, by the imposition of Apostolic hands, the Holy Ghost Himself, the Love of the Father and the Son, descends into our hearts. Ah! deprived of this heavenly gift, in what a state of infirmity had I been left! How many temptations and trials, known and unknown, have I surmounted by its aid in the course of my life! Third, in order, is the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of Bread and Wine—Jesus Himself truly present from Heaven in a manner surpassing all human explanation. O great Mystery of faith! O transporting gift! sufficient in itself by one single reception, to change the ordinary Christian into a Saint! And to whom am I indebted for it? Assuredly, under God, to Holy Church, whose vigilant care has preserved it to me. No such divine presence is there in the sects around us, even themselves being witness.

But, alas! despite all our advantages, we easily fall. So powerful, without us, within us, are Satan, the world, and our own evil concupiscence, the sad effect of original sin, which remains even in the regenerate. Here, then, comes

in fourthly, that most gracious Sacrament of Penance, by which, in virtue of the high commission given by Christ to His priests, provided they have received due jurisdiction, the contrite sinner is absolved upon confession, and receives grace proportionate to his needs. This, too, is a gift, unknown, ignored, nay, to a great extent, even unimagined among the Protestant sects. Ah! do I myself turn it to sufficient account? Am I solicitous enough in my preparation for confession? Are my contrition and resolutions sufficiently sincere? Above all, am I careful when I go to confession, to make earnest acts of the love of God, since, without this love, at least in its rudiments, absolution will not profit me.

Then, for the hour of sickness, for the dread approach of death, that inevitable termination of my present earthly state, there awaits me, fifthly, Extreme Unction; to wipe out the remains of sin, and to fortify me with grace to make a good end; or, it may be, if better for my salvation, to restore me again to health. And since, without priests, all this gracious sacramental system would be impossible; since Thou hast so given Thy holy Sacraments, O my God, that no man can administer them to himself, any more than he can be his own origin, but must needs go to another for them; hence, sixthly, we find in Thy Church the Sacrament of Holy Orders, by which a sacred Hierarchy is maintained, as we have seen in a former meditation, in direct succession from the Apostles, and endowed with all their authority, and with all grace for its exercise. Thanks be to

Thee for this excellent gift. Finally, we have Matrimony, that sacred sign of the indissoluble union between Christ and His Church, joining the married persons in one till death separates them, and imparting to them all the virtues necessary for their holy state.

Oh how can I sufficiently repeat to myself that all these divine Sacraments instituted by our Lord Himself, all these potent instruments of grace and life, come to me through the Holy Catholic Church; that to her, under Providence, I am indebted for them, and that without her they would not even exist!

Then, too, there is that other transcendent power which has been delivered down to us through the same instrumentality,—the power of Sacrifice! Sacrifice has in all ages been the principal and sovereign mode of approaching God, as being in its nature something far higher than even prayer itself. In the earliest books of the Old Testament we find repeated mention of it. God Himself ordained its rites and ceremonies under the ancient covenant, and set apart an Altar and a Priesthood for its solemn and continual ministration. In the New Law the same God, in the gracious form of man, ordained the Great Sacrifice of the Mass, in memory of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection; and as an efficacious means of propitiating the heavenly majesty, by the offering of a Victim no less than divine! In this Holy Sacrifice Christ Himself, the veritable Lamb of God, is immolated on our altars to the eternal Trinity in Unity, being Himself both Priest and Victim;

and the Bloody Sacrifice of the Cross is thereby perpetually renewed and pleaded again. Instituted by our dearest Lord the night before He suffered, predicted and typified in the Old Testament, observed incessantly in the Church from the Day of Pentecost to the present hour, the Sacrifice of the Mass is the principal worship of Christians; and has in a super-eminent degree all the effects that have been ascribed to Sacrifice from the beginning of the world. It is the highest act of homage that can be rendered to Almighty God; it is a thank-offering truly divine; it propitiates for sin; it impetrates countless blessings. Oh how unhappy are those, how deeply to be pitied, who, blinded by the tradition of their fathers, refuse themselves the benefit of this inestimable influence with God; who live from day to day, like the rejected Jews, without an Altar, without a Priesthood, without a Sacrifice! and even make it their boast to do so! How can I be thankful enough for this priceless means of drawing near to God, and to whom do I owe it, under Providence, but to that Church which has transmitted it intact down to these times; when in the hands of heretics, it would have failed away and perished long since, leaving not even the very idea of itself behind, as we find to be the case at present in the Protestant communities.

Most sweet and comforting thought! as a Catholic, thanks to Holy Church, it is not simply my own weak thoughts and feeble prayers that I have it in my power to offer the Most High. I

have something far better. Mine it is, by the great goodness of God, to offer Him, through the hands of His priest, a Sacrifice—and one which infinitely excels all that have gone before—united with which my imperfect petitions have a force not their own, and mount upon wings of light to the eternal throne!

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Church as preserving to us the writings of the Holy Fathers.

I know, O my God, that we are saved by faith in Thy divine word; and this, through the Church. On her testimony it is that we believe the word which Thou who canst not deceive hast revealed; and at her hands again it is that we have received it. But in what form does this august word come to us? It comes to us in various forms, but all admitting of arrangement under two heads—Holy Scripture and Tradition.

A volume might be occupied in showing with what care, under what variety of difficulties, Holy Church has preserved the Scriptures to us. To her “were entrusted the oracles of God,”* and most faithfully has she fulfilled her charge. Of her

* Rom. iii. 2.

vast Tradition transmitted to us through numerous channels, it would be equally vain, in a little work like the present, to attempt an account. Yet I would fain dwell here, briefly though it be, on one not inconsiderable portion of it, the writings of the holy Fathers.

Well has Holy Church comprehended the importance which must necessarily attach to these precious heir-looms. And the contrast is truly wonderful between her reverential esteem of them and the treatment which they have experienced from those outside her fold.

An affectation of contempt for the works of the Fathers is one of the marks which has ever distinguished the offspring of heresy. Under the pretext of shrinking from placing them on a level with Holy Scripture, the authority of which, is by none better understood and maintained than by Catholics; their real aim has ever been to lower them in public estimation. And with this view they have exhausted upon them all the efforts of an unfair criticism, not reflecting that the infidel is encouraged by their arguments to extend a similar contempt to Scripture itself, as all experience testifies, and more particularly that of our own day.

The true reason of this dislike is apparent enough. Protestants endeavour to undermine patristic authority, because its testimony is diametrically opposed to their own opinions, and must therefore be got rid of if they would feel at ease. Predetermined to reject the Church, never will they consent to admit that where all the

Fathers coincide in one same doctrine, that doctrine as being the voice of the Church, must necessarily be true. All their ideas run counter to such a view.

Far otherwise with Catholics. To us these writings are a treasure and a glory, and we cannot find words to thank sufficiently our loving mother the Church, for thus preserving to us the very least part of the "good gift of God."* She it is who inspired so many saintly men of the early ages with the happy thought of committing to writing these riches of Christian wisdom. She it is who has collected and transmitted their works to a grateful posterity. Had she exhibited less regard for them, how few of those we now possess would have survived the injury of time, the ravages of barbarism, and the unconcealed hatred of heretics! But, so dear, O Holy Church, to thy heart was this sacred treasure, that through the darkest periods of history it remained secure under thy protection; to emerge in better times from the innermost recesses of thy monasteries, like the knowledge of the old world from the ark, as an element of spiritual life to an after age.

Appreciating, then, at its highest the modern intellectual wealth of the Church, I would desire, nevertheless, to cherish a special esteem and love for the works of the Fathers, many of which in the form of translation are easily accessible. If I find some things in them which, as uncongenial with our present habits, or incompatible with

* Ecclesiasticus xiv. 14.

our enlarged science, might at first sight appear valueless; I will keep in mind that these writings had a vast influence on the public of their day, and still contain abundant matter of thought for those who study them aright. "After all that can be said, these great men," remarks Bossuet, "were fed on the wheat of the elect, on the true substance of genuine Christianity; and so imbued were they with that spirit of primitive times, which they received at a closer proximity than ourselves, that often what escapes them at random—the mere overflow of their plenitude—contains more spiritual nutriment than the profoundest compositions of a later age.

And these writings, so unique, so various, heresy, infatuated by its own private judgment, would have allowed to perish without regret! Who can doubt this who has at all studied its history? With all the heresiarchs the Fathers have ever been in contempt. Arius and his partizans acknowledged no authority outside their own faction. Nestorius, vain of his natural eloquence and self-acquired knowledge neglected, as we are told, all recourse to the Fathers, and looked upon himself as infinitely their superior. Luther denied them all authority whatever in interpreting the Scriptures, although this especially is their natural and legitimate office. Wickliff held the same opinion; while of the notorious Abelard, St. Bernard writes as follows:—"He admits that he differs from all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. But he affects to despise them, imagines himself their superior, and in

contempt of the sacred proverb fears not to pass the ancient bounds which our fathers have set."

O my God, suffer not this spirit of pride to be mine. Give me the true Gospel humility of Thy Church. It is my desire to sit with profound veneration at the feet of those whom she dignifies with the expressive title of Father, thereby at once implying her gratitude for their services, and intimating that for those who pay them reverence there is a special blessing in store—the blessing of the Fourth Commandment—"Honour thy Father, * * * that thy days may be long in the land."



THIRD MEDITATION.

The Church, as preserving to us the use of Holy Indulgences.

The true Catholic ever finds a charm in contemplating the early dawn of the Faith. It is there that he beholds the spiritual gifts of God in their fountain-head, and learns to prize more highly what Holy Church has done in preserving them through the ages, and applying them to the advantage of her children.

To those who are willing to see it, it is evident enough that from the origin of Christianity, indulgence towards the penitent sinner has always accompanied the rigours displayed by the Church

* Prov. xxii. 28.

against sin. Sincere repentance, and ardent love, have never failed of inducing this tender mother of our souls to diminish the severities of her penances. Our Lord Himself set her the example. Consider the generous and ample forgiveness with which He received great sinners on their repentance. What penance does He impose on Mary Magdalene, or on the penitent thief? None but their grief and their love. A grief so profound, a love so divine, are to Him a satisfaction dispensing with every other. How can He punish a second time those who have already so lovingly punished themselves?

St. Paul had issued a rigorous excommunication against the incestuous person at Corinth.* The sinner repents and weeps. All the Church weeps with him. St. Paul is profoundly moved. He at once comprehends that here is occasion for indulgence, and finds grounds for it—where our Lord had found them before—in the penitent's "over-much sorrow."†

Instructed by such examples, Holy Church from a very early period, made use of similar indulgence when she found a corresponding repentance. Those who had fallen from the faith in persecutions, were always tenderly welcomed back to her bosom, on returning contrite; and received at her hands not only the pardon of their sins by sacramental absolution, but also, under certain conditions, remission of the temporal penance which, according to the ancient discipline, still remained to be undergone. Never did martyr

* 1. Cor. v. 5.

† 2 Cor. 11. 7.

or confessor implore in vain her pity in behalf of these erring children.

That this is the genuine spirit of the Church, her whole history bears witness. Repentance, indeed, she has ever required as a fundamental condition of forgiveness, and it is the basest of calumnies to accuse her of conniving at sin. But as the repentance which she requires must be real, so too the indulgence which she imparts is real also.

And here, with regard to this heavenly treasure of Indulgences—this application to souls in grace from the superabundant merits of Christ and His saints—we may ask again, as of other gracious gifts of God, what would have become of it in the hands of heretics?

The conduct of Luther is a sufficient reply. Who does not know that the question of Indulgences was the rock on which he made shipwreck, at the very beginning of his guilty career? Commencing with an attack on an abuse, for which a few individuals were solely responsible, he went so far as to strike at Indulgences themselves, and had it been permitted him, would have annihilated them root and branch. His successors in heresy and infidelity have left nothing unattempted in the same direction.

If we listen to those amongst them who have condescended to anything like argument on the subject, we shall be told that the suppression of the ancient canonical penances, and the multiplication of indulgences in their place, has introduced a relaxation of morals into modern

Christian life. But when we carefully investigate the state of morals in the early ages, as described, for instance, by St. Cyprian, in the same pages which furnish examples of the old penitential strictness; or when, again, we look at the present social condition of the separated Oriental Churches, in which the primitive discipline has not been modified as amongst us; we detect at once the fallacy of their argument. No proof whatever appears in either instance of any superiority under the ancient system. On the contrary, the experience of those in the best position for forming an opinion, is universally to the effect, that the maternal indulgence of the Church, rightly understood, so far from tending to the deterioration of morals, vastly increases the good works and devotion of the faithful. "He loves less who is forgiven less."*

Let us hear the sentiments of Holy Church herself on this subject, as expressed in her last General Council—"Since the power of granting indulgences was given by Christ to His Church, and since she has used this divine power from the most ancient times, the Holy Council teaches and enjoins that this custom so useful to the Christian people, and approved by the authority of the sacred Councils, be retained; and condemns with anathema those who assert that indulgences are useless, or that the Church has not power to grant them." So speaks the Council of Trent.

O my God, in compliance with this judgment of Thy Church, I will take advantage of the gift

* Matt. xiii. 29.

of holy indulgences, and will be extremely careful how I despise that treasure, which she has so religiously preserved. The Plenary Indulgences, constituting as they do, with the Sacrament of Penance, a kind of second baptism, since to Sacramental absolution they add the entire remission of all temporal satisfactions, both on earth and in purgatory—even these, inestimable as they are, I will not despair of obtaining, notwithstanding my manifold infirmities; for I know that they are easier to gain than many persons imagine, exaggerating to themselves the difficulty in order to find an excuse for their inertness. True it is, these plenary indulgences require very perfect dispositions of soul; yet as it is God who invites us to seek them, so too He is both willing and able to assist us in their attainment. Nor would Holy Church have multiplied them as she has, if we must be Seraphs in order to gain them. No. She offers them to all because they are open to all, and because the grace necessary for their acquisition is denied to none who ask it.

Then, too, there are the Partial Indulgences, so numerous, so diversified, so profitable, for all who have the wisdom to turn them to account. Alas! how much reason have I to blame myself under this head, looking to past years! What spiritual wealth might I not have stored up, had I only been attentive to these easily acquired gains! O Holy Church, with grief I acknowledge that I have not sufficiently valued my privileges as thy child. In order to allure us to various pious practices and

devotions, thou hast attached to them indulgences which double their value. We, on the other hand, too often close our eyes to the excellency of thy gifts, and regard them as we do the miracles of the natural world, which, from their number and constancy, are hardly noticed by the generality of men.

Oh, let me be more careful for the future. Henceforward I will make it my habit to select certain definite indulgences as the object of my efforts.* Every morning I will make a general intention to gain all the indulgences that may be attached to the acts of the day. And as I am aware that certain indulgences are applicable to the souls in purgatory, I will often so apply them; thus exercising one of the best works of mercy, and securing in turn the intercession of these holy souls in my behalf, which will be an inestimable advantage to me in the way of eternal life.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

The Church as ordaining Rites and Ceremonies.

Never am I present at the administration of a Sacrament, or at any other function of the Church, without feeling a profound admiration of her wisdom in thus clothing the divine but hidden

* See the *Raccolta*, a collection of Indulged Prayers. Authorised Translation. By Ambrose St. John, of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, Birmingham. Burns and Lambert.

operations of which she is the agent, with an outward expression of their interior majesty. The sacred vestments of the priesthood—the beautiful altar—incense and lights—solemn chant and symbolical ritual—all bear into my mind a sense of the Divine Presence; and at such times environed by so much that addresses itself to my religious associations, I find in prayer and praise an unwonted facility. True it is these exterior splendours add nothing to God's essential glory. His grandeur has nought in common with that of earthly potentates, who derive their dignity from surrounding circumstances. Thy power, Lord, lies in Thyself; and so too with the religion of which Thou art the Author. The strength of it, the beauty of it, is all within. Nevertheless, in order that it may vividly impress our senses, and through our senses our souls, it needs the aid of exterior objects; and here Thy Church comes in, supplying this need, and, under inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not only carefully preserving Thine appointed ordinances, but instituting others of her own, the utility of which can only be contested by those who are predetermined to see nothing good in her.

From the first Holy Church would seem to have perfectly grasped the important truth that there is a language in outward rite and ceremony, that appeals at once to the rudest and most refined minds. How often at Holy Mass, or at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, or at a Confirmation, or other similar occasions, may we surprise a sudden tear in the eye of the worldling

or heretic, who may chance to be present. So wonderfully do holy solemnities address themselves to the secret depths of our nature. So profoundly do they stir up within us the latent sense of that God, who hides Himself in pity to our infirmities, and constrain us to cry out with the Psalmist, "Great is the Lord and exceedingly to be praised, in the City of our God, in His holy mountain."*

Who does not remember St. Augustine's account of the sweet tears he shed, in the days succeeding his conversion to Catholicism, as he listened to the chant of Holy Church, in the assembly of the faithful at Milan? And who more earnest than this great and saintly genius in inculcating a devout reverence for all the rites of the Church, as supplying one of the purest and most substantial aliments of Christian piety?

But it is not only as impressing the mind through the senses that holy ceremonies have value. As outward manifestations of inward mysteries, they are a standing witness to the Faith of the Church, and constitute as such, an invincible appeal in our arguments with heresy. It was thus, for instance, that St. Augustine confuted the Pelagians, by reference to the exorcisms used in baptism. These exorcisms had been observed from the origin of Christianity; and this acknowledged fact proved incontestably that the doctrine of original sin which the Pelagians denied had ever been held in the Church. Then, again, they are an actual protection to the faith which

* Ps. xlvii. 1.

they testify, checking, by their tacit protest against novelties, all possibility of a prescription in their favour.

Protestants, in discarding the Solemnities of the Church do but more completely exhibit the vast interval that separates them from her. To hear their language one would suppose her ritual system to be an innovation of later ages ; so resolutely do they close their eyes to the fact that all the Fathers downwards contain innumerable references to the same ceremonies now in use, as observed in their own and preceding times.

Sometimes their argument takes another turn. "They cannot discover," they maintain, "in these ceremonies anything but a medley of superstitions. Is not God a pure spirit? and can He delight then in a worship that appeals to the senses?" Most certainly, I reply, God is a pure Spirit ; and none hold this truth more firmly than Catholics. But those who serve Him here on earth are not pure spirits. They have bodies ; they have senses which need to be addressed in relation to the unseen God ; and which need to address Him in turn in their own fashion, and to bear their part with the soul, if we would worship Him in spirit and in truth.

"But the Gospel," they allege again, "says nothing of ceremonies." If so, I rejoin, it assuredly cannot forbid them. But I will go further. It authorises them. Does it not, for example, describe our Lord as employing on occasion, certain exterior observances? His stretching forth His

hands to bless—His kneeling down—prostrating Himself—touching with spittle the eyes and ears—what are all these but so many rites? In the Acts we find the Apostles following His example, all which, surely, is proof sufficient that outward observances in themselves do not necessarily imply superstition. And if, as must be admitted, the Church in her infancy did not exhibit all the external pomp that now adorns her worship, the reason is evident. Persecuted—hunted from place to place—buried in the dim recesses of the Catacombs—that early Church had no opportunity of setting forth the glories of the new Sion. She could but sing her songs in an under-tone amidst tears and blood. No sooner, however, did she enjoy comparative liberty than she made use of her altered circumstances, to indulge the full feelings of her heart.

Again, the heretics renew their charge. We “have borrowed,” they declare, “our ceremonies from the pagans.” I reply—Supposing this to be so, what command exists against applying the treasures of Egypt to the ornamentation of God’s tabernacle? We have borrowed the pagan temples, purified them, transformed them into Churches, and made them subservient to the worship of the true God. What harm, if it were so, in turning to a similar account the lights, incense, processions, chants, and other usages of paganism? But, in point of fact, it is not paganism that furnished the Church with these rites. Rather, it borrowed them from her. The majority of them were in use in the Jewish Church long before Christ’s

coming ; and there is every reason to believe that the pagan world obtained them from this source, or from the Church in her still earlier stage. And if our adversaries must carry their opposition so far as to condemn the Catholic Church for turning to her profit the ceremonies of Judaism, let them be consistent, and condemn in like manner, her appropriation of the ten commandments. No ! If the Church of the Apostles has adopted a ceremonial, it was not, let us be assured, from a desire simply to copy the Jews or any other nation ; but because, in that knowledge of the human heart communicated to her by her Almighty founder who “knew what was in man,” she intimately perceived our need of exterior sensible signs in order to lift us up to God ; and that apart from them religion can hardly subsist. So true is that saying of St. Augustine’s, that religious ceremonies “were to the Jews a type of good things to come ; to the pagans a sacrilegious counterfeit invented by the spirit of lies ; while to the Christian they are the robe of honour which commends and beautifies the truth of God.”

And here among the observances of the Church, let me, in conclusion, specify one class, distinct of its kind, which has a peculiar claim on the love and veneration of Catholics—that of Sacramentals, as certain religious usages are termed from their resemblance to Sacraments, although they are, in fact, of simply ecclesiastical institution. Oh, what countless blessings is the great Catholic people continually deriving from the use of Holy Water, of the Sign of the Cross, of the Agnus

Dei—of blessed rosaries, medals, scapulars—and from other similar practices ! Let an unbelieving world ridicule such observances as vain and superstitious. The true Catholic has learnt by experience of himself and others how profitable they are to the soul ; and is well persuaded that nothing can be superstitious on which Holy Church has set her seal.



FIFTH MEDITATION.

*The Church as preserving the Holy state of
Virginity.*

The abnegation of sensual enjoyments as facilitating a closer union with God, was not unknown or unpractised under the Old Law. Elias, and others of the prophets led a virgin life. God declares by Isaias that to such as observe it, He will give “in his house and within his walls, a place and a name better than sons and daughters.”* The Book of Wisdom sets forth the blessedness of continence. “She shall have fruit in the visitation of holy souls ; the precious gift of faith shall be given her, and a most acceptable lot in the Temple of the Lord.”† Virginity, then is no invention of the Catholic Church. It is an inheritance which she has received, which

* Is. lvi. 5.

† Wisd. iii. 13.

she preserves, and which she appreciates even more highly than the Church of old.

How, indeed, can she avoid estimating it at the very highest, when she sees Mary rejecting the august dignity of a divine maternity, if thereby she must cease to be a virgin—when she sees her adorable Founder, Himself a virgin, surrounding Himself with virgins, and giving to virginity His manifest predilection—and when in words of profound import she hears Him declare that there are undoubtedly those whom God calls to this eminent state:* or, again, when she hears St. Paul announcing with apostolic authority that virginity, the state of his own choice, is to him so great a treasure, that he would wish all to resemble him in this respect, did he not know that “every man has his proper gift from God, one after this manner, another after that?”†

No sooner had Christianity commenced its career, than we see holy Virginity extending with it side by side. There is nothing more touching to the Catholic heart, than to observe the ardour displayed from the first by the Pastors of the Church in behalf of this cherished portion of Christ's flock. Witness the zeal of St. Cyprian in its defence. Witness the preaching of St. Ambrose, which was such, that mothers would hide their daughters away, for fear of their being attracted by him to this sublime vocation. Both St. Augustine and St. Jerome wrote in praise of holy virginity, and have left behind valuable

* Matt. xix. 12.

† I Cor. vii. 7.

instructions concerning it: while to the depth and extent of this wonderful movement in subsequent ages, testimony is borne by the multitudinous families of the religious Orders, with their countless monasteries and convents, those sacred asylums where innocence finds security from the perils of the world, and whither penitence withdraws to purify herself with tears.

And this treasure of holy virginity, let me repeat, we owe to the Church. She alone has preserved it safe, when the heretics would have cast it away. To hear them, one would suppose it to be a state simply unattainable to human nature. And, indeed, so far as unaided nature can go, they are right. But has not our Lord told us that "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God"?* Moreover, the Church, in establishing this holy state surrounds it at the same time with such precautions and supports, both internal and external, that perseverance in it may be rendered to the sincere soul morally certain. Mortification, prayer, and the avoiding of temptation, form a rampart, behind which, according to the Angelical Doctor, virginity may rest in perfect safety. With this protection it becomes not only possible but easy; and when Heresy brings forward its ignominious inability to observe it, it does but make a tacit avowal of the deplorable state to which it has reduced its followers. It is only after renouncing prayer, mortification, and watch-

* Luke xviii. 27.

fulness, that chastity becomes impossible to the Christian.

O, my God, how I love Thy Church for her ardent devotion to holy virginity! How too I admire the inventiveness of her charity in turning this blessed state, not only to the particular advantage of those who embrace it, but to the general welfare! Almost all her great deeds she has wrought by virgins. And without going back to distant times, what a countless multitude of beneficent works may we not behold in our own day carried on by the religious orders! Think only of the daughters of St. Vincent of Paul, crossing the rude Euxine on their mission of charity, in spite of all that might naturally deter the timid virgin of Christ; and amidst the most horrible scenes of death, tending the wounded of the Crimea, with a devotion that extorted the admiration of friend and foe! Such power has holy virginity, renouncing, as she does, the joys of married life, only to become the mother of all by virtue of the tenderest charity. Heresy, it is true, made a similar attempt on the occasion just referred to. Contrasted, however, with the Church of the living God, its human inventions did but exhibit more completely the innate feebleness of the system. Impotent because it has cast off virginity, Protestantism failed, as all admit, of the success which Catholicism so easily achieved. The charitable ladies who, with the best intentions, came out as nurses, returned again, with few exceptions, to their homes and temporal affairs—the virgins of Christ remained at the pillows of the dying!

And here, we must remember, that it is not only in her great religious orders that the Church preserves the treasure of holy virginity. She carries this sacred institution into the very midst of the world, thus diffusing a higher spiritual element amongst mankind, and retarding with the salt of life the corruption of the age. In all countries where the Catholic Church exists, individuals are to be found, especially of the gentler sex, who, without forsaking their home life, have consecrated themselves privately to God by a vow of perpetual chastity. Living thus in the world and yet out of it, it is curious to observe how the world on its part deals with them. Sometimes it seems bent on retaining them. A young person, for instance, thus situated, dedicates a portion of her day to works of religion: straightway the world cries out, as though it were injured; it complains of the cruel loss to society of one who was its ornament; it urges the wrong she does her family. At other times it would be rid of them at any price. It seems to find them an intolerable burden and to be bent on shaking them off: it advises them to seek a home for themselves: if they will not renounce that life of perfection which so contrasts with its own softness and vanity, it would have them at least pursue it where it may not be troubled with the sight: it repeats the old complaint, "Let us lie in wait for the just because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings. He is grievous unto us even to behold, for his life is not

like other men's, and his ways are very different."* Such is the feeling of horror and repulsion with which the world regards holy Virginity. So vexatiously does this angelic state set before it the grossness and infamy of its own carnal life. But all it can do is to no purpose. In vain it allures, in vain it terrifies. Enlightened with heavenly wisdom, these pure souls will not allow themselves to be caught in its snares. They are not ignorant of its devices, nor of Satan's either, † whose interest it has espoused, and whose spirit it breathes. "Vainly is the net spread before the eyes of them that have wings." ‡ The souls which the world would retain if it might, will escape from its hold at God's call; and those that against its wish remain with it, it will be condemned to endure and even to admire, whatever it may say to the contrary.

Virgins there will always be in the Catholic Church. Ever amongst her children will the life of religious perfection be held in honour. It is true, strictly speaking, the Church might subsist without it. All she needs is her God. But although one thing be not absolutely necessary to the existence of another, there may still be the closest relationship between them. Blossom and fruit may be cut off and the tree still live. But so long as it exists it will never cease to put forth again its blossom and fruit in their season. So, too, it is certain, the Church can subsist without religious

* Wisd. ii. 12.

† 11 Cor. ii. 11.

‡ Prov. i. 17.

communities, and the ruin of them does not necessarily involve its own. But no less certain is it that there is an intimate relation between religious communities and the Church. The Church institutes them; the Church maintains them; the Church imparts to them her spirit; and finds in them the fullest expression of her own inward life. Hence it comes to pass that wherever the Faith takes root we presently see the virgin race appear; and if religious communities have been destroyed in a Catholic country, they quickly revive anew.

O Holy Church of my God! what glory is thine that Virginité and thyself should be thus inseparable! What thanks we owe thee for having preserved to us this white lily of chastity, which here on earth so odorous, in Heaven will breathe a fragrance all its own!

SIXTH MEDITATION.

The Church as recording her own history and the lives of her Saints.

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us, it seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mayest

know the truth of those things in which thou hast been instructed.”*

Thus it is that St. Luke describes his own divinely-inspired Gospel. It is a record, a narration. The Acts of the Apostles, which we owe to the same Evangelist, is of a similar character. And as age succeeded age, Providence never failed to raise up writers who found their vocation, some in collecting the principal facts of ecclesiastical history; others in composing the biographies of particular saints; others, again, in “setting forth in order” the long majestic life of the Church itself, the mystical body of Christ, and imperishable as its Head.

The service thus rendered to Christianity is simply incalculable; and first, as regards the general History of the Church, what an exhaustless mine it presents! All is profitable in it, not excepting even the faults and scandals which it records. We cannot open its pages without lighting upon some incident full of interest; some lesson of profoundest wisdom; some holy life or death precious in the sight of God; and through its every line there breathes that same spirit which animates and guides the Church herself. Ah! I wonder not at the esteem in which the noblest intellects have ever held this study; nor at the reply of him who being asked what book he considered best adapted to form a theologian, answered that it was Ecclesiastical History. For there both Dogmatic and Moral Theology may be studied, the one in its original deposit, the other in the action

* Luke i. i.

of the Church. There, the Fathers, Doctors, Bishops, Sovereign Pontiffs, of all time, appear not simply as the author or pastor, but in relationship with their contemporaries, and with the various secular matters in which God permitted them to be involved for our greater edification.

In perusing this magnificent history, one seems to hear the Church herself recounting what she has done for God, and what God has done for her. It is the comfort and consolation of her pilgrimage thus to record His works in her, and hers for Him; and at the same time it is also our own great encouragement. Nor from the very origin of the Church has it been otherwise. The Acts and Epistles sufficiently show at what pains the Apostles were in keeping the faithful well informed respecting their labours and successes in various countries. Thus St. Paul and Barnabas, "as they passed through Phœnice and Samaria, related the conversion of the Gentiles, causing great joy to all the brethren."* Afterwards, on arriving at Jerusalem "they were received by the Church, and by the Apostles and Ancients, declaring how great things God had done with them."† So, too, St. Peter narrates to the Faithful "in what manner God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people to His name."‡ Oh, how often have I envied the happiness of those first children of the faith, in thus receiving

* Acts xv. 3.

† Acts xv. 4.

‡ Acts xv. 14.

from the very lips of the Apostles, these precious details of the progress of the Gospel. But is not this enjoyment in some sense, my own, since I may still hear them speaking in those venerable pages in which they truly seem to live again?

The History of the Church thus commenced by inspiration, has been continued age after age down to our own day by countless writers. Of late years, with the advancement of scientific research, much additional light has been thrown upon portions of it; and thus various calumnies with which heresy had overlaid a multitude of events and characters, have met their deserved fate even from the hands of its own children, and the memory of many a holy Pontiff, long the victim of false imputations, has been reinstated in due honour.

O Lord, be Thou ever blessed for thus supplying us in Thy good Providence with the invaluable history of Thy Church, in her course through the ages, and amidst the peoples of the earth. Nor less do I thank Thee for that portion of her records, which as distinct from ecclesiastical history, has an object and forms a class of its own—the lives of the Saints—those edifying biographies which bring before us in such minute and interesting detail, the beautiful examples of the just under the new dispensation. There it is that the best and dearest of Thy servants appear before us, each in his own natural character, and each adorned at the same time with that evangelical beauty of justice, wisdom, perfection, which distinguishes all the Saints of God. What an immense assemblage do these lives exhibit, of all that can most

interest the mind of man! What a repertory of sublime maxims, wondrous deeds and miracles, heroic virtues! And these virtues again how countlessly diversified! Here sweetness predominates, without prejudice, nevertheless, to a lofty sense of right and duty; there an astonishing fortitude, but ever allied with the loveliest patience and charity. What a beautiful spectacle again, the saintly bishops of each succeeding century present, opposing themselves to the injustice of the world, and steadily refusing to covenant with iniquity!—a St. Basil, for instance, boldly addressing a tyrannical Prefect; or a St. Ambrose prescribing penance to an Emperor! How delightful in the most infelicitous periods to meet with Saints of either sex exhibiting so noble a protest against the evils of the age, often by word of mouth, always by the silent testimony of their lives. This courageous spirit which belongs solely to Catholicism, and is only found in the Saints formed in its school—how diametrically it stands opposed to that feeble laxity disguised under the name of tolerance, which always disposes heretics to please the many, and to flatter the vices of the great!

Aware of this weak point, Protestant writers wisely shun all contrast between their own leaders and the Saints of the Catholic Church. There is, in fact, no comparison between them even under ordinary circumstances; still less on those more critical occasions, when the only resource of the children of truth is to die in its defence, while the sons of error bow the knee before their impious

protectors—as Luther before the Landgrave of Hesse, or Cranmer before Henry VIII—and offer ready incense to any vice that wears a crown! Oh how easy it is to see by the light of history, that while the Spirit of God lives and energizes in the Catholic saint, the heresiarch simply acts on his own private judgment with nothing but human infirmity for his stay.

Grant me, Lord, a great devotion for the Lives of the Saints. Without prejudice to other spiritual books, let me find in these heavenly biographies my especial delight. And as I peruse their instructive pages, let me bless Holy Church for the gift, and recognise in it another benefit from the great Mother of our souls.



SEVENTH MEDITATION.

The Church as maintaining solemn days and seasons and other holy practices.

How delightful it is to welcome anew, in their turn, those sacred recurring festivals, which, garlanding the year in uninterrupted succession, seem to form that coronal of which the Psalmist speaks; “Thou shalt bless the crown of the year of thy goodness.”* Yes! What flowers and fruits are to the world of nature, returning perennially in their season to gladden our hearts and

* Ps. lxiv. 12.

supply our necessities, the same are religious festivals to Catholic faith and piety. The Church, among her other efforts for the good of souls, could not omit this important means of sanctification. God Himself had given her an example in ordaining solemn feasts under the old Law, which were celebrated with all the magnificence of the Jewish ritual. Of these the greater portion indeed passed away with the rest of the ancient dispensation. Some, however, more intimately connected with mysteries, that found in Christianity their complete fulfilment, have been retained in substance by the Church; and so it comes to pass that the institution of the Sabbath, for instance, or, again, the Feasts of Easter and Pentecost, having been for ages the boast of the Hebrews, have, under a transfigured aspect, become our glory also, and on still higher grounds. Not but that the Catholic Church has her own special glories besides—festivals all her own, the memorials of her Lord and His Saints, and which together with the former, she has arranged for her children in an admirable order of succession, thus constituting, what we denominate the ecclesiastical year.

What words can express the multiplied benefits arising to the Christian soul from this majestic system of periodical devotions? The Church has thus, so to say, immortalized the divine benefits, bringing them by this means incessantly before her children in festivals which at once recall their memory and revive their graces. At the same time, since devotion and doctrine are correlative, there

is not a feast but brings with it some mystery for our adoration; and thus she places us under the happy necessity of reviewing continually every portion of our Faith, not only in its leading outlines, but down to its minutest details.

O my soul, be faithful to the ecclesiastical year, and "let no part of so good a gift overpass thee."* First in thy love be the great Solemnities in honour of thy God Himself, whether in the splendours of His glory, or in the depths of that abasement which He bore for love of thee! And that thou mayest observe them as completely as possible, strive to enter into the mind of the Church, by employing, so far as lies in thy power, her own sacred office composed for the day, so simple generally, and always so beautiful. Language, warmer perhaps, and more glowing, may be found in private books of devotion. But nowhere shall we find such solid spiritual food, or thoughts so adapted to the occasion. Constituting as they do a complete religious course, it will be our comfort to know that in following the offices of the Church we are omitting nothing of importance either in point of doctrine or worship, which would infallibly be the case were we to make a guide of our own impulses.

What a joy it is to the Catholic heart, to see the Festivals of Mary so beautifully intermingling themselves with those of her Divine Son and Lord throughout the sacred year. The Church, which

* Ecclesiasticus xiv. 14. *

has received all good things at the hands of Mary, (since it is she who has given us Jesus), next after her divine Son, could not possibly neglect this gracious Mother in her commemorative ritual. Ever to the ears, to the eyes, to the hearts of her children must she be commending her by whom God has willed, that such great gifts should come to us. Those who profess to regard our Lady as an ordinary woman and no more—let them strive, if they please, to abolish her feast days. Let them repudiate our salutary homage to the Mother of God, disrobe her of her glory, and here again, as on other points of faith, give the lie to all Christian antiquity. They belong not to the family of Christ, they know not its joys, they share not in its past or future; but the true Catholic, admitted by an ineffable grace to the communion of Saints, hails with ever fresh delight those great Feasts in which Holy Church displays her devotion to the divine Mother.

So, too, with the Festivals of the saints, those chosen friends of God. Taught to invoke them from his childhood, the Catholic experiences on the days consecrated to them, especially on that of his own patron saint, a consolation, a repose, an encouragement, difficult to express. And as he is careful to observe religiously the Feast Days, which in Catholic countries set a whole populace in motion, in honour of some great local or national Saint; so, too, according to his ability, he is not oblivious of the minor festivals, which are content to remain unnoticed, save when their delicate per-

fume reveals them to a more than usually attentive piety.

While preserving to us the feasts of the saints, Holy Church has also preserved to us their sacred relics. Not an altar through the wide world on which these precious treasures do not repose. Oh, with what pride, with what loving reverence the great mother regards these mementos of her sainted children! She wraps them in silk and gold. She burns lights before them. She bears them on high in her solemn processions. How devout would she have us to be towards these holy memorials of those of whom the world was not worthy; and whose souls are now in enjoyment of the beatific vision—memorials which God Himself has repeatedly honoured by working miracles through their instrumentality.

So, too, as regards the use of Holy Images, in sculpture or painting, whether of our Lord or of His sacred Mother and the saints, this too has been preserved to us by the Church. Images contributed to the decoration of the temple under the ancient law, by the divine ordinance. If in one place the Almighty proscribes their use, this, as we all know, is to be understood in reference to paying them divine worship, which would have been idolatry. No one however comprehends better than the Catholic that the honour paid to holy images does not terminate in the images themselves, but in those whom they represent, thus passing from the type to the anti-type. With these considerations present to my mind, I wonder not at the earnestness with which,

Holy Church has maintained this pious usage; nor at her zealous opposition to those whose sacrilegious hands would break in pieces and give to the flames these precious emblems of the Faith. True it is, the use of images is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. It rests upon Tradition. But can we forget those words of the Apostle—"Stand firm and hold the traditions which ye have learned, whether by word or by our epistle"?* Can we forget that Tradition duly authenticated is the word of God no less than Scripture itself? Can we ignore all the Decrees of Councils and Sovereign Pontiffs in favour of this devout practice? Can we turn a deaf ear to the attestation of those holy martyrs who have died in defence of it; or to the testimony of God Himself, who by numerous undoubted miracles has authorised and consecrated it? O my God, how I admire Thy Holy Church, adorning from the first her altars, her sacred vessels, the vestments of her priests, with Christian symbols; multiplying in her temples images of our Lady and the Saints; and above all, setting up aloft before the eyes of her children the glorious Crucifix, that true brazen serpent, which as often as it is gazed upon with confidence and love, excites a tender penitence in the soul, the infallible harbinger of pardon and peace. But while I admire her reverent boldness, still more do I praise her care and precaution in all that regards this practice, lest, venerable and edifying as it is, it should be made the subject of any abuse. Here is to be seen the

* 2 Thess. ii. 14.

real triumph of the Catholic Church. While heresy under the specious pretext of purifying and reforming, only contrives to ruin and destroy, the Church has the secret of using holy things in the fulness of Christian liberty, and using them to her children's great advantagel

How touching it is to observe the care with which Holy Church excludes from her temples all profane pictures, and whatever might disturb our religious associations! When the painter seeks her inspiration, as he always should, she offers him none but the purest and sublimest ideas. She wishes to see nothing in her sacred buildings that savours of voluptuousness, or might give rise to unchristian thoughts. She enjoins her bishops to be watchful that no inappropriate picture be exposed to the veneration of the faithful, and banishes to the museums the greatest masterpieces of art, if she finds aught in them likely to injure the faith of her children or mislead their piety. Yet she loves magnificence, too, and beauty in her palaces, and all that tends to win over that great faculty, the imagination, to the cause of religion. Thus it is that she makes every effort to adorn her sacred buildings. She sets up beautiful altars. She encompasses her sanctuaries with rich and sumptuous decorations. She omits nothing within her power to make them glorious. And while the successors of Judas, the sons of heresy and unbelief, exclaim, "to what purpose this waste of what might have been given to the poor?"* she, on the other hand, who never forgets or

* Mark xiv. 4.

neglects her own poor, nor those even who belong not to her, keeps in mind the example of holy Magdalene bathing the feet of Jesus with the most precious ointment she could procure, and strives to honour God with her best. Yes! she would wish her sacred buildings to typify, even more than Solomon's, the splendours of the eternal sanctuary, into which Jesus our great High Priest "has entered by His own blood."* And so she multiplies within her houses of prayer all that can contribute to this beautiful idea; and what with flowers, and incense, and glistening lights, and chanted ritual, so beautifies, on occasion, her sacred tabernacles, that the divine glory seems bursting forth again as in the Temple of old, to gladden the hearts of the people of God.

O my God, I desire to love all that Thy Church loves, and to partake of her spirit. Whenever I enter her sanctuaries, after first rendering my homage to our Lord Himself present in the Blessed Sacrament, I will visit with attentive devotion the crucifix, altars, and images, which adorn the sacred building. Let others be satisfied with admiring the artistic beauties which they display. For myself, food for the religious spirit is what I would principally seek. And more than once it has happened as Thou, Lord, knowest, that I have found my soul melting with tender devotion before one or other of those simple representations which, in their homely truthfulness, will impress the mind beyond all that

art can do, with the deep mysteries of Thy life and of Thy death.

And here I might close this long catalogue of advantages in the spiritual order rendered to mankind by the Church, but that a reflection occurs which I cannot let pass. All the benefits of Holy Church, dwelt upon in the preceding pages, have been her benefits to the living; is there, then, nothing done by her for the dead? Are they left by her as by the Protestant sects, in obscure forgetfulness, their real condition totally ignored and set aside?

Far otherwise. What words can express the tender anxiety of the Church for her departed children? She knows, indeed, well enough, that for those who are safe in Heaven nothing is needed. Their God is to them all in all. She knows equally well that for those who have passed miserably to Hell nothing will avail. For ever must they pine in their hopeless misery. But for those (and who they may be God only knows) whose temporary lot after death is cast between these two conditions—for those who having departed this life in God's grace yet in an imperfect state, are by the law of His justice detained for awhile in Purgatory, ere they are admitted to the beatific vision—for such what shall this fond mother do? Ah! we know. She it is who has introduced that reverent care of the bodies of the departed, changing the old pagan funeral pyre to burial in the earth, as more suitable for those who are to rise again in Christ: she it is who consecrates the Christian cemetery for the repose of

her dead till the great day of the Resurrection, and invests their interment with such hallowed and touching rites; and shall she not take an equal care for their souls? Yes. There is nothing more strikingly manifest in the whole history of the Church than her uniform system of prayers for the dead. Those Requiem Masses which she offers for them on occasion of their decease, and again on their anniversaries, and at other times—those countless foundations established throughout Christendom for the maintenance of similar Masses in perpetuity—the institution of All Souls' day—the prayer for the faithful departed so universally forming a portion of the ordinary daily prayers—the numerous indulgences applicable to the holy souls in Purgatory—all these pious observances sufficiently attest the intense solicitude of Holy Church for her dead, and how vividly she realises their state.

Following them thus with her tender charity into another life, she at once shows herself a true mother, and manifests an intimate conviction that her own existence extends beyond the limits of this world. Oh happy lot to die in thy bosom, dear mother of our souls! May I so fall asleep. May I breathe out my last sigh into thy compassionate breast, and may thy loving requiem be perpetuated over my grave!

EIGHTH MEDITATION.

Recapitulation.

While engaged on this portion of our subject, one, unknown to the world, but whom Jesus condescends to bless, and who encourages by her prayers this little work which she has seen so far, has put in my hands a brief outline, which I take leave to introduce here, by way of recapitulation, and as supplying my own omissions. The writer is young in authorship; and I give her sketch just as it came to me, not doubting that the reader will excuse its simplicity, while in the excellent thoughts which it comprises in a small space, he will admire the goodness of Him who “makes the tongues of infants eloquent.”*

“God sent His Son to accomplish the work of our Redemption, and Jesus did all that was given Him to do. So, too, our Lord has commissioned the Church to maintain His work, and the Church, obedient to His instructions, fulfils all that He has commanded.

“Our Lord went about doing good;† and the Church also goes about doing good. Our Lord brought down good things from Heaven; and the Church, faithful to her office, diffuses them over the earth. She has ever done so—at the dawn of Christianity—in the middle ages—in the present day; and she will do so to the end. In all

* Wisd. x. 21.

† Acts x. 38.

periods, she has been the bearer of the treasures of life over the globe. Everywhere has she penetrated—to the remotest islands—across deserts—and through the wild forest. She is at home in the junks of China, and has surmounted the fastnesses of Thibet. And she alone has done all this. No other religious body has ever spread like her over the whole earth, and been received everywhere as the one Church of God.

“Our Lord laboured, preached, healed the sick, made the deaf to hear, and raised the dead. The Church has done the same. She heals by miracle the diseases of the body, and by grace the maladies of the soul; she and she alone. No other society can contest this power with her.

“The Church has suffered, and will always suffer, all that our Lord has suffered—contempt, blasphemy, persecution, and the like. Ever is there suffering in some portion of her; ever is some member in pain. Yet notwithstanding this she is perpetually on foot looking after the salvation of her children. She is the kindest of mothers to us. Immediately on our coming into the world she receives us in her arms—she baptizes us. Later on she calls us to confession and confirmation. Just at the age when none notice us, because we are too big to be petted, and too little to claim respect, she gives us the greatest of all gifts,—our First Communion. This marks our entrance into life, for until we have made our first communion we are nobody. Accordingly even the most irreligious parents never refuse this to their children.

“Time passes. Her sons and daughters grow up, and then the Church marries them. Even in countries where the civil law enjoys precedence, unless the Church follows after with her sacred rites, the marriage is not in estimation; and those who are so married are not well received. Not so with heretics. With them the civil law is superior, because they do not come from God.

“The Church has also her holy virgins, some devoted to prayer and contemplation; others actively employed, either in nursing the sick in hospitals, in prisons, in their own homes—or in instructing youth—or reclaiming the forsaken. Virgins, too, there are, living in the world, to show it the good way, and it is the Church that makes and keeps them. No other religion has its virgins. The Church of England can send its charitable ladies to the East, but of virgins she has none, nor ever will or can have them.

“The Church visits her children and comforts them in their troubles. She passes along the streets, and stops at the doors of the poor for whom nobody cares. She cheers, sustains, blesses. When we are sick—infirm—in old age—she comes to succour us. She brings us the pardon of our sins; she brings us our God; she brings us the hope of a happy eternity. From the beginning of our life she watches over us; she anoints us in our last hour; she buries us honourably in the grave; she prays for us when we are gone, and always prays for all her children departed.

“The Church has instituted Festivals to the honour and praise of God, for the purification of

her children and their renewal in holiness. The Church produces just men for earth, and Saints for Heaven as no other religious body ever has done or will do. The Church loves the Saints because she is truly their mother, and other religious bodies love them not because they are not mothers. They love them not because they are not theirs. They refuse to honour the Saints, and no wonder, for they have none of their own. It would be strange indeed if they came to us for them,—to the very family out of which they have been ejected for their pride and opinionativeness.”

I know not what my readers may think of this little essay—for myself I only regret its brevity; and now, without permitting myself to add anything to it, I proceed to consider the benefits of the Church to mankind in a lower sphere, but one replete, nevertheless, with the deepest interest.

CHAPTER VI.

SERVICES RENDERED BY THE CHURCH TO MANKIND
IN THE TEMPORAL ORDER.

FIRST MEDITATION.

The Church and the Family.

The relationship of the Church to the temporal order involves considerations, social and political, of the profoundest kind. Catholic writers, of the highest ability, have occupied themselves with it, and the philosophical student will find all he can need in their works—works in which the highest genius is found in happy submission to the Faith.

For myself, I aspire to no such heights of speculation. All my desire is to assist the reader to a sufficient elevation from whence he may take a general view of a subject so full of interest.

There have been not a few who have entered on these topics, prejudiced violently against the Church, and, like the prophet of old, predetermined to condemn; yet who, like him, again, have found themselves in the end constrained against their own efforts, to admire and to bless.

Far different is my case. Already I foresee that, in viewing the Catholic Church in her connection with earthly things, as before with heavenly, I shall still have nought for her but benediction and praise, and that my language can only be, "How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel."*

In considering the temporal benefits of the Church, the first object that presents itself is the Family. The family, delightful name, stored with transporting associations! But what would become, let me ask, of the family, what would become of domestic life, without the Church? It is not too much to say that, apart from her, these terms have not even a meaning! The Jewish people, it is true, exhibit in their sacred books some lovely examples of family life, but then, we must remember, they constituted the Church of that day. External to it, there were men, there were women—there were masters, that is to say, and slaves. There were children—in constant terror of a father who could take their lives on his own authority. But there was no Family—no sacred bond uniting hearts in one—no mutual confidence—no reverence of the strong for the weak, such as we now see.

Years flow on, and at length the Church assumes its more perfect form, that of Christianity. It reveals itself in the first instance, at Nazareth. There, in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, it comes before us as a Holy Family, the type and perfect

* Numbers, xxiv. 5.

ideal of that Christian home, which Judaism knew but imperfectly, and Paganism not at all. This sublime type is subsequently interpreted to us, applied, developed, by our Lord's own instructions, and those of His Apostles, on the family duties, and especially by St. Paul in His Epistles. Henceforth the servitude of the wife is at an end. The husband is taught to love her "as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it."* His life is to be occupied in sustaining and beautifying hers. His spouse becomes the partaker of all his hopes and anxieties. She is admitted to his most secret thoughts and associated in his high destiny. She is no longer a mere tool. She is his companion, his helpmate, the complement of his felicity. The Sacrament in which each have shared, and which the Church alone preserves inviolate—the Sacrament of Matrimony, so exalted in dignity, that St. Paul declares it to represent the union of Christ and His Church—endows them with mutual charity, a chaste affection, and respect blended with love, as gold with silver in some exquisite vase. Thanks to religion, thanks to the teaching of the Church, the wife finds her protection in the very feebleness of her sex. Listen to the considerate tenderness of St. Peter, who himself had been a married man—"Ye husbands also," he says, "dwelling with them according to knowledge, giving honour to the woman as to the weaker vessel, and as to the co-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.†

* Eph. v. 25.

† 1 Peter iii. 7.

The unity and indissolubility of marriage are among the consequences of its sacramental character. Paganism was a stranger to it. The Jew, whenever in the hardness of his heart he found the yoke of an ill-assorted union intolerable, betook himself to divorce. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, imparting as she does, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, the graces necessary for rendering enduring the most painful eventualities of married life, reiterates incessantly in the ears of husband and wife, those solemn words of Christ Himself—"What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."* Divorce is a crime in her eyes, as it was in those of her Lord. Far otherwise is the case with the sects, and the difference may be easily accounted for. The Catholic Church is intimately conscious of being the sole inseparable Spouse of that divine Word who has so closely allied human nature to Himself; and in this consciousness lies the secret of that inflexibility with which she has ever maintained the unity and indissolubility of the marriage bond. The sects, on the other hand, are conscious of no such mystical union with Christ; hence, by the very instinct of their nature, so to say, they readily admit of divorce, at the instance of the civil authority, and even became its principal maintainers.

The Christian family finds its complete and final development in the spirit which Holy Church imparts to the relationship of parent and child. From her divine teaching parents learn the duty not

* Matt. xix. 6.

merely of sustaining their child's physical existence, which nature teaches the very animals, but of cultivating reverently, lovingly, the hidden graces deposited by holy baptism in the mind and heart of the feeble being entrusted to their charge. They become, if I may use the term, its earthly providence; and dividing their toils between them, their whole effort is to lay up a spiritual store of good things for the infant in whose life they both seem to live over again. They spare him neither advice nor reprimand. They can even chastise when necessary, but not so as to forget the Apostle's warning—"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord."* Thus it is that round the Christian hearth there springs up, on the one side an enduring interest, on the other an unflinching reverence. Old age comes to the parent, but it brings no change in these respects. Faith, still more than nature, immortalizes within his heart, his love for a son over whose temporal and eternal happiness he will watch to his last breath, with a solicitude unenfeebled by years; while the son, in his turn, educated in the school of piety, his heart always open to the tenderest inspirations, will exhibit towards his parent an ever increasing respect the nearer he draws to the tomb.

Finally, the Church, while she thus instructs the Christian family in its duties, may be viewed as in herself an example of them. Is she not, as we have already observed, taken collectively,

* Eph. vi. 4.

the family of God? And her parishes, her dioceses,—what are they but so many aspects of this vast family? At the head of the former she places a pastor with the authority and very name of father. To him it belongs to baptize, to preach, to offer sacrifice for the rest. They are his children, his family; dispersed, it may be, in various occupations, through the week; but on Sundays reuniting together before the common altar of their God. The diocese, again, with the bishop at its head, is a family on a larger scale, but no less entirely linked in one. Oh, how beautiful a spectacle of unity a well ordered diocese presents! The bishop in the midst of his clergy is as our Lord among the apostles. All is authority, obedience, charity. So, too, the whole Catholic Church, throughout that *orbis terrarum*, which has been given to Christ as His inheritance, is but one multitudinous family, whose members are in all countries, and its Head at Rome. There, in matter-of-fact, for eighteen centuries and a half, the successor of the Prince of the Apostles has sate, and sits still, on his Apostolic Chair; and all populations of the earth, or, to use Scripture language, “all the families of the Gentiles” * “that obey the Gospel,” † speak of him as the Holy Father, and offer him the profoundest homage of their hearts.

Such is Thy Holy Church, O my God. All within her preaches and persuades union, order, and harmony. Let the Christian family model

itself after her pattern, and it cannot fail of becoming well worthy of Thee.

SECOND MEDITATION.

The Church and Society.

The Church is to society what the soul is to the body. She and she alone has given life to the nations by drawing them out of the darkness of barbarism, and bringing them to the light of Faith and civilization; and she alone is their life still. How I love to contemplate, in the page of history, the progress of that marvellous transformation, of which God was the Author and His Church the chosen instrument; and to see all Europe, in the course of a few centuries, becoming one great Christendom! The public conscience, which still survives amongst us, and like a vast spiritual rampart, obstructs the advancing tide of corruption, preventing it from extending, as it did under the old empire of paganism—whence comes it but from the Catholic Church? Yes! She alone has formed it, and in forming it has purified our whole moral existence. She alone it is who by the example of the faithful; the decrees of Councils; the weighty injunctions of her bishops; and in various other ways; has introduced that improved state of society, that politeness of manners—giving such a charm to all

the relationships of life—which we of the present day enjoy, little thinking, perhaps, of the source from whence they emanate. What, without the Church, would have become of humanity, at that disastrous epoch when the Roman empire sank from corruption and sheer exhaustion; and when the in-coming nations were as yet in the feebleness of infancy? She alone was the refuge of society in that day. She opened her arms to it in its trouble. She sheltered it in her bosom; and restored it to hope, to life, to glory.

Consider only the fact that it is the Catholic Church who instilled the spirit of the Gospel into the old Roman Law, a strange mixture till then of pagan aberrations and profoundest maxims. At assemblies, in which clergy and laity sate side by side, she, with her sweetness of order and mercy, found means to inspire numerous admirable statutes, which entering permanently into the code of Catholic nations, have effected the happiest results. Nor is this all. By her incessant admonitions, by preaching, by confession, by the direction of souls, the Church, with a success never attained by the isolated efforts of philosophy, gave public ideas a higher direction, and infused into them, above all, the grand precept of fraternal charity. Hence, less atrocity in war. Hence, a greater elevation, generosity, refinement in the intercourse of private life; the gradual abolition of slavery; husbands and fathers exchanging their old despotism for a gentle but firm authority; public games losing their sanguinary aspect. All this, and much more has resulted

from the felicitous influence, the unsparing labours, of the Church; and we cannot enough bless her for it.

Thanks to her mild and salutary intervention, the "nations whom thou, Lord, hadst made curable"* rose up out of their misery, and perished not. Shocks the most formidable—disruptions of kingdoms—changes of dynasties—instead of destroying society, passed off with a smoothness, an equableness, under the tempering influences of the Church, which ravish with admiration for her, the student of history, who reads with honesty of purpose, and a mind disengaged from those odious prejudices that cloud so many intellects worthy of a better fate. Yes! It is most wonderful, most consoling, to see the transmutation of whole peoples, unavoidable as society advanced, accomplished under the inspiration of the Church, with moderation, and even a certain reverence. And when later on, nations, blind to their true interests, or carried away by a momentary phrensy, have aimed at constructing the social order anew, without calling Holy Church to their aid, or it may be, having first banished her out of their reach, they have found cause to mourn over the baneful and bloody results of their fatal error. Witness the French Revolution of the last century, a warning to Europe, the echoes of which will ring through the world's history for ages to come.

Suffer, Lord, that it be the last of its kind. Instruct the nations. Save them from themselves.

* Wisd. i. 14.

And grant that as, through inevitable mutation the human race sweeps upon its way, in that order “of things that are done under the sun,”* it may learn from past experience obedience to the voice of the great Mother, whom thou hast given us, and who would rather prevent beforehand the maladies of her children than have to repair them afterwards.

THIRD MEDITATION.

The Church and the powers of the earth.

O Holy Church of my God, how admirable has been thy policy throughout in connection with the depositaries of temporal authority! None know so well as thyself that “all power is from God, and that he who resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.”† Hence thy respect for civil governments, in which thou hast ever recognised the deputies of the most High, who has Himself placed in their hand the sword, which “they bear not in vain.”‡ This was thy spirit under the old law no less than the new. Obedience to duly constituted authority thou hast ever regarded as a matter of conscience, as a necessary tribute on the part of the individual, to the cause of peace and good order in the world.

But while thus obedient thyself to the kings and princes of the earth in their civil capacity,

* Ecclesiastes i. 14.

† Rom. xiii. 1.

‡ Rom. xiii. 4.

and preaching obedience to others, ever hast thou laboured, O Church of God, to render the sovereign worthy of the sceptre he bears, and a fit instrument of His people's happiness. Oh! if men did but fully comprehend all that the world owes thee under this head alone, especially during those semi-barbarous ages in which so much was decided by material force, what thanks would they not render thee! Ever in the ears of princes resounded the voice of thy Pontiffs, reiterating to them, in every form of language, that justice and equity ought to preside over all their actions; that by their very office they were bound to be the strength of the feeble, the terror of the wicked, the help of widows, orphans, and all destitute persons—that if now they are the judges of others they must fall one day into the hands of Him “who judges justice”*—and that they are bound to keep this last inevitable judgment constantly before their eyes. Yes! if civil authority in Christian countries has, with few exceptions, borne a paternal aspect, we may say with reason that this is owing to the perseverance of Holy Church in reminding princes of their duty, from the days of Constantine, Clovis, Charlemagne, till now.

With what delight I behold her, in her own beautiful Coronation ceremonies, impressing on the Christian king a high sense of his exalted dignity, and claiming in return for him the reverence of his people! How earnestly she inculcates upon him, that power, even when absolute,

* Ps. ix. 5.

should never be arbitrary ; that the divine law is over all, princes not excepted ; and that while they rule others they are bound to obey reason and religion themselves. With what plainness of speech she urges him to worship God with his whole heart ; to defend the Catholic Faith, and uphold its ministers ; to observe justice with all men ; to consult in all things the good of his people ; and to look to heaven for his reward.

Her instructions have been justified in the result. The princes who most profited by her wisdom and drank of her spirit have been foremost also as the founders of their country's glory and happiness. Oh what honour is hers to have formed such men as St. Louis, King Alfred, St. Edward the Confessor and others—to have been loved by them as the tenderest of mothers—and to have shed in return over them and their reigns a splendour which has secured their names a place amongst the noblest of history ! How delightful to see them always placing the interests of the Church first, assured that in serving her they were serving the country of their love, who owed to her its fairest glories. How delightful to mark the Christian humility of these great men ; and their perfect union with the chief prelates of their time, who were their friends, their confidants, their counsellors ; and whom Providence seems to have expressly chosen for so delicate a position. It was no slavish submission to Holy Church that influenced these admirable sovereigns. No ! it was a noble trustfulness in her. They knew well enough how to maintain their own authority ;

but they had the wisdom also to protect and honour hers ; and the result was that perfect harmony between the spiritual and temporal powers, which is the principal source of peace and happiness to nations.

But, O Church of God, if thou hadst the prudence to accept and turn to advantage the favour of kings, never didst thou suffer them to make of thee a tool or parasite ; and the thing of all others to which thou hast clung fast, next after the Faith, has been thy liberty. Whenever thou hast encountered princes who, blinded by their own majesty, have thought either to subdue thee by force, or bend thee to their purpose ; thou hast met their attempts, the former by a passive resistance in which the blood of thy martyrs has flowed like water ; the latter by vigorously defending thy privileges without laying aside respect for theirs, and always rising above the temporal favours with which royalty would have bribed thee to compliance. Oh how veritably hast thou shown thyself the daughter of Heaven by the admirable skill with which thou hast walked the earth, avoiding those mistakes which so often occur in societies purely human !

Be thou blessed ; O Church of God, and proceed in thy felicitous course. Continue to enlighten, to honour, to sustain with thy prayers and with all thy influence, the temporal power. Be the Mother of the great no less than of the little. Accept their assistance without allowing thyself to be taken captive by their gifts. If the kings of the earth persecute thee, suffer

patiently and pray for them. If they contemn thee, remember Herod's Court; and the humiliation of thy divine Head will be thy consolation. If they obey and reverence thee, direct their filial love towards the profit of souls and the general welfare. If they tempt thee, tell them as thou hast ever told them, that thy kingdom is not of this world; and that although in times of persecution thou canst bid welcome to chains of iron and find in them a glory and delight, thou hast no such enthusiasm for the garlanded links of gold, which are sometimes insidiously proffered thee in the pleasant intervals of peace.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

The Church as favouring the arts, and all works of beneficence.

How blind are they, nay, sometimes how guilty, who obstinately maintain that the Catholic Church has shown herself inimical to the progress of art and science; and that if she had her way, she would rather retard than assist their advancement!

Because Holy Church is immutable in her faith, which as emanating from God, whose works are perfect, admits of no addition or variation, hence they argue that she must necessarily be opposed to progress of every kind; and

because she labours principally for heaven, they persuade themselves that she must be indifferent to things of earth, and wholly without concern for man's temporal welfare.

History, however, totally refutes such a view. Assured by divine inspiration, that "wisdom has length of days in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and glory,"* the Church has always encouraged her children in elevating and ennobling pursuits. Her greatest doctors of the earlier ages brought to the service of religion a varied and extensive erudition which they had acquired in the pagan schools, but which they did not, on that account, cast aside on entering the sanctuary. St. Gregory Nazianzen, on his baptism, did not forsake the muse, nor St. Augustine his historical and philosophical studies. Of all her persecutions she regarded as the most dangerous that of Julian the Apostate, who had conceived the diabolical plan of closing the public schools against the Christians, and thus removing from them the key of knowledge, "which they use," he observes, "as a weapon against us." He spoke in the name of idolatry, of which he had constituted himself the restorer and apostle.

Later on, the arts and sciences, menaced by barbarism, whose only instinct was to lay waste and destroy, found their refuge in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The monasteries became their retreat for many an age, and from them

* Prov. iii. 16.

those sublime works of Christian architecture received their impulse, which, with all our admiration, we still perhaps insufficiently appreciate. What would have become of painting, of statuary, and their kindred arts, with no better protection than that of the desolating Hun, or fanatical Mahomedan? The Church preserved and tenderly cherished them all, when otherwise they would have been irreparably lost. No! Extraordinary as are the forces called into action by the advanced science of our time, I will not suffer them to make me oblivious of the marvels which sprang up in other days under the inspiration of faith. Nor can I forget that, as in the Middle Ages, no work of human skill ever lacked her encouragement, so still, in Catholic countries, she is ever at hand to confer her benediction on the mighty instruments of civilization, to which modern invention has given birth

What, in point of fact, has the Church to fear from the progress of the arts and sciences? Well directed, they can but subserve her interests; ill directed, she can lament indeed the perversion of man's energy, but she has no malediction for them, since they are the offspring of human genius, that sacred fire which God Himself has kindled. To place mechanical perfection higher than moral or spiritual, this, beyond a doubt, she condemns. Never with her consent shall the children of God forget the imperishable riches of eternity for all the gold and silver that teem in the busy marts of commerce and industry; for "what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole

world, and lose his own soul?"* But she knows that before we can reach heaven we must traverse this land of our earthly exile; and that while religion enjoins us to suffer privations patiently, when God visits us with them, it by no means forbids us the enjoyment of such pure and lawful pleasures as an advanced civilization supplies.

Meanwhile, side by side, alas, with the material advantages which human progress brings with it, there is still, as we are obliged to remember, a vast amount of poverty, sickness, and other evils, which no physical appliances can reach. Here then Holy Church finds another mission of the sublimest kind, and to which she has never been wanting. Who can reckon the pious works, the beneficent institutions, to which she has given existence, and the very idea of which, until she began them, was unknown to the world! Under Paganism the portion of the sufferer was almost universally neglect, indifference, contempt. The Church came to his relief, and found in herself the requisite means. Scarce had she commenced her course, when, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, her tender solicitude was directed to the widows and destitute. Later on she founded for every variety of human suffering, institutions on a vast scale of charity; organized them with infinite wisdom; and inspired multitudes of both sexes with astonishing devotion and perseverance in their maintenance.

Now that the Church has given an impulse

* Matt. xvi. 26.

to the cause of charity, it is easy enough for infidels and heretics to produce their imitations, and in their self-laudation to deny her her well earned glory. But to the unprejudiced reader of history, it is clear enough that the whole system of public beneficence as now existing, originated in the Catholic faith; that it is this faith which has sustained and directed its development from age to age; that in this faith lies its true strength; and that, in fact, by far the largest portion of charitable works throughout the world, is still in the hands of the Catholic Church.

From St. Paul, collecting alms through the opulent cities of Greece for the poor Christians at Jerusalem, to St. Vincent of Paul, building very palaces for the destitute, and establishing organizations for their relief, which are still flourishing, and have diffused their felicitous influence through all quarters of the globe—the Catholic Church, wherever she has set her foot, has multiplied without cessation the miracles of her charity. Again and again has she sold her possessions, down to the very chalices of the sanctuary, in behalf of her poor. Nor has it happened unfrequently that her bishops and priests, after giving up their all for the ransom of the captive, have delivered their own persons in exchange when nothing else remained for them to bestow. 20

CHAPTER VII.

OUR DUTIES TO HOLY CHURCH, AND HOW TO DO
HER SERVICE.

FIRST MEDITATION.

To love the Church.

The first and foremost of all our duties to God is to love Him. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."* So, too, as regards the Church. We must begin with loving her.

In thus acting, we shall simply be following our Lord's own example. "Christ," says the Apostle, "loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it;" † and to what did He deliver Himself up? To toil, to suffering, to death. St. Augustine, in a single sentence, that contains more than whole volumes, speaks to a similar effect. "Believe me, my brethren, the measure of our love for the Church is the measure also of the Holy Ghost's presence in our souls." ‡

The lives of the saints testify that in proportion

* Matt. xxii. 37.

† Eph. v. 25.

‡ Tract 32 in Joan.

to their advancement in grace and closer union with Christ, so much the more ardent was their love for the Church. Let their example be my encouragement. I wish, Lord, to feel in my dying hour, that confiding trust in Thy mercy, which filled their hearts, and which was in great measure a fruit of their devotion to Holy Church. Oh what happiness did they find in the consideration that they had been faithful to her, and were dying in her bosom! Their eyes, accustomed to turn towards her in life, sought her with their last glance before closing for ever. The thought that they had much loved the Church, and had done their utmost to serve her, gave them courage against the terrors of the divine judgments. So great is the Christian's confidence when he reposes upon this rock of salvation, and falls asleep on its breast.

I desire, then, O my God, to love the Church because Thy Saints have loved her; but I desire it also for another reason; namely, because Thine enemies hate and persecute her. Yes, here is a second ground for devotion to her cause. If Thy Church "were of the world, the world would love its own, but because she is not of the world, but Thou hast chosen her out of the world, therefore the world hateth her."* Yes, the world hates her; but this very hatred makes her to me more dear than ever; and I know not how to express my exquisite grief when I see her receiving from her children's love so little reparation for this diabolical hate. Alas! how feeble is the affection of

* John xv 19.

many Catholics for the Church! Scarce, seemingly, do they ever think of her. Scarce have they any suspicion of the marvellous treasures—the fruits of Christ's precious blood—contained within her, or of the reverence due to her every word. Scarce are they touched, ever so slightly, by the attacks and outrages of which they see her made the object. How many years of my life have I myself allowed to slip away without loving her as I should! And yet, O my God, I have a heart that turns eagerly to all that is good and beautiful in Thy works. Ah, I must strive to know her better, in order to love her more truly. Were it a question of achieving some great and difficult work for her, I might with reason find an excuse in my weakness. To speak her praise with the eloquence of a Chrysostom—to defend her with the pen of an Augustine—to conquer souls for her with the zeal of a Francis Xavier—this indeed is beyond me. The services, which these elect souls have rendered her, are at an elevation far above my attainment. But, when it is simply a question of loving thee, O Church of my God, then we are all on an equality. The poorest, the obscurest soul, has no limit to its powers of loving. Henceforth, then, I vow to thee my dearest affections; and to love thee with all my heart, next after God and His holy Heaven, shall be my chief delight, as it is my truest wisdom.

Mere feeling, however, I know too well, is not all that is needed. The proof of our love is to be found in our works. I desire, then, to labour for the Church, and for this purpose to consider care-

fully the principal ways of serving her. But, before all and above all, let me fix firmly in my mind the necessity of cherishing a genuine interest for all that concerns her. The thought of her must be precious to me. Her name must make my bosom thrill. I must gather up with eagerness the most trivial things that pertain to her. As others are constantly looking out for news on the affairs of the world, so must I have nothing more at heart than the welfare of the Church. Thus, events that appear to worldlings of the utmost consequence, shall have little interest for me otherwise than as they affect her destinies. This shall ever be my point of view for contemporary history, and my criterion of its importance. Surely this feeling of interest is inseparable from all true love. The loving mother, the tender wife, are conscious of having their minds occupied by the objects of their affection. Would they consider they loved them sufficiently if they only thought of them once or twice in the year, and that by chance—if they spoke of them unconcernedly and seldom? And how can I imagine then that I love the Church, if I simply take her for granted, so to say, without caring to learn what she is doing, suffering, gaining, losing? No, this would be coldness, indifference—not love.

Holy Church, can I repeat it too often, is my mother. How often have I admired the ready devotion, the tender respect, the delicate minutiae of affectionate observance, with which a well educated son treats his mother! His conduct should

be my pattern as regards the Church. That devoted son often calls to mind, how his mother gave birth to him in great anguish, presently turned to greater joy; how she nourished him from her own breast; watched over him with un-failing tenderness; bore with him, perhaps, with heroic patience; and it becomes his constant effort to requite her for these benefits, of which he loves to feel and acknowledge the obligation. But has not my mother, the Church, in like manner, brought me forth to Heaven by Holy Baptism? Does she not suffer continual anguish in "labouring to form Christ in me;"* that is, to conduct me to that perfection of which He is the model, and which it costs so much to acquire? Does she not nourish me with heavenly doctrine? Does she not open to me the fount of the Sacraments? And if Tertullian could say of God with such touching truth, that "there is no such Father as He is," may I not say also of my holy mother the Church, that there is no such mother as she is—none who so deserves our love?

* Gal. iv. 19.

SECOND MEDITATION.

To pray for the Church.

I know, O my God, that in the strength of Thy divine promises, Holy Church is imperishable, and needs not the assistance of my feeble prayers to sustain her. Though I should forget her, Thou forgettest her not. Nevertheless Thou hast willed that we should pray for her; and she herself, inspired by the Holy Ghost, although she knows Thou wilt support her always, prays for herself incessantly in her sacred offices. Can I do better than blend my voice with hers?

Then again, although the Church, as a whole, is imperishable, still she can receive hurt in her members, some of whom are ever perishing. Nay, there are times when entire portions of this great body detach themselves, and fall into heresy or schism. Now prayer may prevent or diminish this evil. I will then be constant in my petitions for Holy Church. I will entreat God to augment her day by day in numbers and in merit; and especially will I join in her public offices, giving particular attention to her collects on Sundays and Festivals, so comprehensive and yet so simple in their devout intercessions. This attendance shall not be with me, O my God, a mere matter of form. As I listen to the solemn chant, the very voice of Thy Church shall seem to sound in my ears, and waft my spirit to Thee.

Yet neither will I limit my prayers for the Church to these public and solemn occasions. In the privacy of my own closet, frequent and spontaneous shall be the upliftings of my soul on behalf of that great family of which I form a portion. Let others wander through the regions of imagination, and amuse themselves with fantastic reveries. For me, I too will sometimes give flight to my thoughts, but with a far different object. I will traverse in spirit this vast world, which Thou hast made, Lord, to be the inheritance of Thy Church, and will review her condition in various countries. Her progress—her difficulties—her needs—shall pass before my mind's eye. And wherever I see sufferings endured—great works in hand for Thy glory—ought that in some unusual degree, seems to plead for the divine assistance—to that quarter will I apply my prayers, and thither will I call down the plentiful showers of Thy grace.

Every year as it comes round will bring with it its stated demands on my supplications. The great movement of human events will ever be adding fresh and unforeseen claims. But my heart shall be always ready.

And first, as regards the ecclesiastical year, when those solemn seasons recur at which the faithful are accustomed to approach, in larger numbers, the holy sacraments,—at the great festivals, for instance, of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost,—I will set before my mind the vast multitudes who are then betaking themselves to God, that they may have life, “or may have it

more abundantly."* I will pass in prayer round the countless confessionals of the Christian world. They shall be to me as that Pool of old, in which "lay a great multitude of sick, of blind, of lame, of withered, waiting for the moving of the water."† What a difference, however! for the Probatica offered a remedy solely to corporal maladies, and to the single sufferer who first descended into it; whereas the fountains of grace which have been opened in the Church, cure the spiritual infirmities of all who approach them, even the most inveterate, if but they come with the requisite dispositions.

But, alas, how few seek these dispositions with sufficient earnestness! What numbers make their examination of conscience hurriedly, are careless about contrition, and go to confession with an ungenerous coldness! Ah, I must come to their aid. I must keep in mind these infirm souls, and when the priest, like another angel of the Lord, descends into the pool to stir the spiritual waters, and impart the grace of absolution, I must do the work of those who carried the sick in their arms, when otherwise they might have had long to wait; I must pray for them fervently, perseveringly; and who knows what good service I may thereby render, O dearest Lord, to Thy holy Church! I will invite others to join with me, and we will do sweet violence to Thy sacred Heart. We will intercede between Thee and our brethren. If sometimes they forget their

* John x. 10.

† John v. 2.

own interests, we will not. We will implore for them that contrition, the need of which they feel so insufficiently, and Thou wilt not refuse it to our supplications, since in praying for them we shall be praying with the Church, and shall be strong in her strength.

The termination of the great Festival seasons brings with it another service to be rendered our holy Mother. In a great house on the day after a banquet, how busily employed are all the domestics! They have to restore everything to its place, to clean what has been soiled, to see to the repairing of what has been damaged. So too, Lord, in Thy Holy Church, the great Feasts seldom pass over without leaving behind them something to set right. Among so many good communions may there not have been mingled some guilty sacrileges? How many have not benefited as they ought from the adorable Eucharist, solely through their own fault? Shall we not endeavour to make reparation for them, to pray for them, that Thou wilt give them grace to repent, and not suffer them to fall into that fatal sleep of obduracy, which is sometimes the penalty of a lukewarm or sacrilegious communion? So too, have we not to ask perseverance for the good, and the preservation within their hearts of that germ of life which Thou hast implanted? What limit is there, under this one head, to the service which a devout child of the Church may render her!

The penitential seasons, again, of Lent and Advent,—general communions,—confirmations,—

sermons, — retreats, — novenas, — instructions, — shall I allow them to pass unnoticed? No: unless I mistake myself, I love Holy Church too well not to unite with her in these her efforts for the conversion of souls. At such times my presence, my prayers, shall not be wanting; and as I listen to the words of sacred truth, dropping like dew from Heaven, I will lift up my heart to Him, who alone can vivify by His grace what man has sown, remembering those words of the Apostle: “Pray one for another, that you may be saved.” *

But over and beyond its ecclesiastical course, the events of the year, as they affect the Church, will demand, as already observed, my earnest intercessions. At all times the tribute of my prayers must be ready for my suffering brethren in Christ throughout the world; some, it may be, in a state of persecution; others, constrained in their religious liberty; others, in the midst of pagan populations; or in countries which heresy and schism hold under their yoke. Especially will I pray for the Holy See, so threatened at the present time in its temporal power, and for the much enduring Pontiff, who so sweetly, so firmly, presides over its destinies. Ah, should I be worthy the name of Catholic, implying as it does a certain universality, if my ideas never extended beyond my immediate religious circle? Surely I am bound to take a larger view, and to widen my horizon. And since communication between different countries is now become so easy and

* James v. 16.

rapid, I should turn to advantage this happy progress of our civilization, by keeping myself well informed on the state of Holy Church in distant regions. This is no novel idea. The Acts of the Apostles, as we have already seen, show how eager the first Christians were to learn the progress of the Faith, and how ready the Apostles were in gratifying them. This spirit has been the same in all ages of the Church, and I desire that it may be mine also. Impelled by no common curiosity, but by that tender fellow feeling which unites all Christians in one, I will consult then the publications that periodically report upon the progress of the Church, and no quarter of the Christian world shall be a stranger to my sympathies.

Yes, Lord. With Joseph I will "go and see if all things be well with my brethren." * And when I have ascertained their necessities, their anxieties, their sufferings, my prayers shall ascend for them more fervently. I will put myself in their place. Their difficulties shall become my own, and I will do for their relief all that, under similar circumstances, they would be ready to do for me.

* Gen. xxxvii. 14.

THIRD MEDITATION.

To obey the Church.

Of all our duties to Holy Church, the principal one is, beyond a doubt, to submit ourselves to her authority. The spirit of the children of this world, is to avoid everything like a yoke, and to follow, as far as may be, their own inclination. Ours, O Church of God, is to be willingly guided by thee! "The sons of wisdom are the Church of the just, and their generation obedience and love."* Ever do those words of our Lord to His apostles and their successors, ring in our ears, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."†

We wait not till thou puttest thy injunctions in form, O Holy Mother. The simple intimation of a desire on thy part is enough for us. By this mark are thy true children known. Accordingly all that thou approvest I approve. All that thou lovest I love. All that thou condemnest I condemn. In all matters of law and custom, however indifferent they may seem, my wish is to know thy mind and conform myself to it. Thou preservest, for instance, religiously, the midnight Mass at Christmas, as a precious remnant of primitive fervour. I also, will hold it in honour, and it shall be my joy to attend it and profit by it. Thou lovest procession, and solemn chant, and holy

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* Ecclesiasticus iii. 1.

† Luke x. 16.

incense, and all the exterior pomp of worship. I love them also. There are those who in the vanity of their minds, and the littleness of their faith, affect on some apparently trivial point, a different view from thine. I mourn over them, and will beware of their example. Without, perhaps, any intentional criminality at its commencement, such a line of thought opens the door, nevertheless, to grave abuses. Many a heresy has thus originated. Its founders began by differing from the Church on matters of counsel, they ended by contradicting her on questions of precept and faith.

If thy simple intimations are laws to us, what will thy commandments be, O Holy Church of my God! They will be as sacred to us as those of God Himself. We know, indeed, that thou art able to give dispensations from them, and that in cases of necessity thou dost not make them obligatory, whereas the divine commandments admit of no such exemption. But this is the sole difference that we can discover between the two; and when thine enemies urge that the ecclesiastical law is the production of men like ourselves, we fearlessly reply that these men are, nevertheless, the commissioned agents of the Most High, sent to us in His name; and that consequently our submission to their authority is, in reality, a submission to His.

Yes! I desire to obey the Church in everything. An injunction on her side shall always be met by submission on mine. In all matters of faith and conduct her voice shall be my sole guide. The decisions of her General Councils I

accept as my infallible rule; and with the same reverence do I receive also the solemn decrees of her Sovereign Pontiffs. Far be it from me to dispute, as some do, the greater or less opportuneness of this or that ordinance. The Holy Father, who sees from such a height, who possesses so many sources of information, and receives from God such special graces, must needs be able to judge far better than we, what is suitable to the time.

Some there are who make loud protestations of reverence for the Holy See, and profess themselves prepared to carry out the least indication of its wishes; but, when its decisions happen to thwart their preconceived ideas, to derange their plans, or to demand of them a sacrifice, then they forget all their fine words. Such conduct shall not be mine. My obedience shall be, by God's grace, genuine, sincere, and the same under all circumstances. Whenever, therefore, the Holy Father shall warn us of a peril; shall denounce such a society as to be avoided; shall represent such a line of conduct, or such a work as injurious to faith or morals; I will not search for counter-arguments. I will only think of obeying.

Let me remember again that as one of the faithful I have an interest in the decrees of the Bishop of my own diocese, and of the Diocesan and Provincial Synods. It is still Holy Church who by these her authorities speaks to me with the one sole object of directing me Heavenwards. I will acquaint myself, therefore, with these

decrees according to my ability, and this in order to conform myself to them.

My obedience shall extend further still. It shall reach the lowest step of that mighty hierarchy in which Christ is equally present from the summit to its base. The pastor of my own parish or mission will at times have occasion for his injunctions, his permissions, his prohibitions. Never will I be ashamed of seeking his advice, of submitting to his judgment. Far from me be the spirit of those who, confining themselves to a purely human view, cannot discern in God's Priest anything more than an ordinary man. In all spiritual matters he is to me the representative of Christ and His Church. True enough he is not infallible; but it is the duty of his office to teach the Church's infallible doctrine and to impart her spirit; and in addition to the ordinary authority which he has from her, she not rarely invests him with faculties for dispensations of a special character. If nature, proud to the core, may sometimes rebel within me against the submission due to him, and stir up certain repugnances, I will nevertheless stand firm despite of her revolts. I will continue unflinchingly in this path of secure humility, remembering that religion well understood, is nothing more than a grand system of humiliation in order to life eternal.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

To labour for the advancement of the Faith.

It is hardly possible to love Holy Church sincerely, without feeling constrained to labour in extending its empire over souls. I know that all are not Apostles; and that no man can take upon himself any ecclesiastical office "unless he be sent."* But I know also that to lay persons there are means open of satisfying their utmost zeal; and that they are permitted, nay earnestly invited, to assist the clergy in the work of their ministry. How thankfully St. Paul speaks of "those women who had laboured with him in the Gospel, with Clement, and the rest of his fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life!"† Oh, that such praise were mine! It is my ardent wish to assist in spreading the faith both by my prayers and other exertions, but especially by aiding its missionaries. Holy women ministered to our Lord and His Apostles of their substance.‡ Let me follow their example, knowing that I cannot offer Holy Church a greater service, and that in supporting her missionaries, I shall in some sense become myself a preacher of the Gospel.

Yes! I must be in earnest. I must be up and doing. For all through the wide world there are those who need bringing into the Catholic

* Rom. x. 15.

† Philip. iv. 2.

‡ Luke viii. 3.

Church, that they may be saved. And first my thoughts naturally turn to the heathen, upon whom the light of the Gospel has never dawned. I know that if they have the misery to be lost, they will be judged less severely than we shall; for St. Paul declares that “they who have sinned without the law shall perish without the law.”* I know that God is too just not to make a difference in His chastisements, as in His rewards. But I know, nevertheless, that the least punishment of Hell is an evil, terrible, immense, infinite, and that we are bound to make the utmost efforts to “snatch from the fire”† those unhappy souls who seem to be on its very edge.

If the Heathen claim our charity, what shall we say of the Jews, amongst whom there have been in our day many remarkable conversions? Alas! They called down the Blood of Christ “upon themselves and upon their children.”‡ May it be upon them; but not as they meant it. May it descend in power and grace upon the people that slew their God, and hasten the day of their recovery. Grant them, Lord, to understand that the Messiah whom they look for, is already come. Let the veil that is upon their heart be at last taken away, and vanish before the Gospel beam. Such shall be my constant prayer for the ancient people of Thy love, and inheritors of Thy promises. And I will endeavour to offer it in the very spirit of St. Paul when “testifying

* Rom. ii. 12.

† Jude 23.

‡ Matt. xxvii. 25.

the truth in Christ" he declared that "he had great sadness for them, and continual sorrow in his heart." *

The conversion of those whom Heresy has severed from the flock of Christ, shall be another object of my endeavours. I am aware, Lord, Thou hast good reasons for permitting their error and its obstinate maintenance. With trembling I adore Thy justice which punishes the pride of some by allowing them to fall, thereby warning others to be humble. Yet I know also what zeal has ever animated the Saints in bringing back these wanderers to Thee. I desire to labour in their behalf with the same spirit of sweetness and patience. I have more urgent reasons for endeavouring to save them, than they for choosing to be lost. Despite, then, the notions of tolerance, or, more properly speaking, indifference, which stamp our age, I will not let them perish without earnest and repeated efforts, according to my opportunities, to arrest their deplorable fate.

Then, too, how can I forget that large class of persons whom we are continually meeting in society—men who have not formally abjured religion but who live as if they had; who, it may be, call themselves Christians, but whose whole life and sentiments betray at bottom a genuine apostacy. These, also, I will endeavour to assist prudently, by a word in season; and, so far as in me lies, I will help in the diffusion of religious works calculated for their benefit. Never, at any rate, shall my alms be wanting towards educating

* Rom. ix. 2.

in our colleges and seminaries, those who may one day be active instruments in bringing them back to God.

But amongst all the various means that offer themselves for the conversion of souls, there is one work which claims my affection in a special degree. It will be already guessed. It is the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. Simple in its origin, incredibly fruitful in its results, easy in the duties which it involves, it possesses all the characteristics with which God marks His own creations; and shows itself to be worthy of Him who "has chosen the weak things of the world that He may confound the strong, and the things that are not that He might destroy the things that are; that no flesh should glory in His sight."*

A poor French girl collects among her acquaintance, equally poor with herself, a few little sums, which she devotes to the support of distant missions. To the eye of the worldling it is foolishness, but "that which appeareth foolish of God is wiser than men."† The Almighty blesses the feeble commencement of a work which rests for its support on Himself alone. The grain of mustard shoots up, and extends its branches far and wide; the little fountain grows into a river;‡ the small cloud expands and brings mighty showers.§ Truly, it is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes.||

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

† 1 Cor. i. 25.

‡ Esther x. 6.

§ 3 Kings xviii. 44.

|| Ps. cxvii. 23.

But if feebleness of means is one characteristic of a divine work, its opportuneness is another. Misled by their passions or blinded by ignorance, men rarely choose the best moment for their efforts. The very sense of life's shortness encourages precipitation. It is otherwise with God. He who sent His divine Son in the plenitude of times, ever chooses His own season; nor could the Association for the Propagation of the Faith have come to the aid of the Church at a more favourable moment than the date of its actual appearance, the dawn of the present century, when there were so many evils to be repaired, such innumerable openings for good.

Next to the Church herself, whose whole existence is transcendent and without parallel, nothing approves itself to me as more evidently coming from Heaven than this glorious enterprise of Christian charity. To oppose it would be, beyond doubt, to resist God. To neglect it would be to risk falling under the malediction of those who do the work of God negligently.* To take it up zealously, and carry it forward with all our might, is to enter into the gracious designs of God towards His Church, and to bear a part in their fulfilment.

Who can express all the advantages which Holy Church has already derived from this admirable institution? Those prayers so fervent, so numerous, in which all its members share alike—those Annals from which we derive so much in-

* Jer. xviii. 10.

formation and precious encouragement—that mutual edification received and imparted by its associates, who have no less at heart the spiritual good of each other than the conversion of distant lands—those alms so diligently collected, so wisely portioned out, so safely conveyed to their several destinations, so gratefully received and turned to such account—what blessings are here for the whole Church of God! Add to which the extreme facility of becoming a member of the Association. A short prayer, a little subscription, is all that is asked of any one who joins it. As to the prayer, brief though it be, it surpasses, nevertheless, all others, being that which our Lord Himself has taught us, and which Holy Church has so intimately appropriated as to place it among her sacramentals, so that every time we utter it, we speak in her name. As to the subscription, it is so small as to be perfectly within the reach of persons in the very poorest class of life. The labouring man, the needle-woman, the factory-girl, the poor widow, the merest child, can all find a place, if they will, in this work, at once so simple and so sublime; and can thus enjoy the happiness of sharing, really and effectually, in the extension of Christ's kingdom, than which a greater felicity can hardly be conceived.

FIFTH MEDITATION.

To realise the Communion of Saints and its consequent obligations.

I believe in the Communion of Saints, O my God, and regard it as one of the greatest treasures in Thy Church. I love to contemplate that great body, whose every part is so exquisitely knit together, and through which Thy grace, purchased by the Cross, circulates as the life-blood in our veins. Thanks to this felicitous and ineffable union, the Church triumphant in Heaven sympathises with the Church militant on earth, and both again with the Church suffering in Purgatory. O my God, draw closer and closer these sacred bonds. Pour into our hearts such love, as shall suffice us for this our double relationship with the holy souls triumphant and suffering; such love as shall encourage us, on the one hand, to look trustingly to our brethren who are so near Thee for their intercessory aid in our earthly conflict—on the other, to comfort by our prayers and penances those poor sufferers who cry to us continually, "Have pity on us, have pity on us, at least you our friends."*

I believe in the Communion of Saints; and it is my joy to know that, as this communion unites us with those who have passed into another world, so also it blends in one all God's children here.

* Job xix. 21.

Yes. Each living member of the Church militant, (such is the teaching of Faith, and I receive it with the deepest gratitude,) has a share in all the prayers and sacrifices offered up within her pale, in all the virtues, graces, merits, of the whole body. Whatever lofty spiritual attainments are reached within her,—whatever victories are won, or marvels wrought—become, in some unspeakable manner, the common property of each and of all. Such is the admirable harmony of her divine organization, the good done by any member not only profits that member, but extends itself to the rest. O my God, it is my ardent desire to add my own contribution to this heavenly treasure; and I would wish to live so purely and perfectly before Thee, in the practice of all virtue, that whilst I work out my own salvation, I may also benefit my brethren in Christ.

And here let me glance once again at the constituent members of the Church below, so that no important portion of them may escape my loving remembrance.

We have already spoken of the Church's visible Head, the Sovereign Pontiff, recognising in him the representative of that invisible Lord, who, seated amid the splendours of the Saints, awaits on high the perfect accomplishment of His divine mission. To this our holy Father, Bishop of Rome, and Successor of St. Peter, we have again and again, through these meditations, bowed down our hearts in loving homage, resolv-

ing at all times, and in all places, to maintain His sacred privileges.

Around him, like an august senate, or rather, shall we say, like the ancients who encompass the throne of the Lamb in the Apocalypse,* we behold gathered the most exalted members of the Christian family. As a support to the Pope, the Cardinals are ever at hand, either to assist him with their advice, or to go forth to sovereigns and nations as his legates in matters of high ecclesiastical moment. The respect which encircles them, and the titles of dignity which they bear, may be an offence to the worldling, but are not so to me: for well I know that, instructed in the School of the Gospel, they refer all the honours which attend their position, to that God whose ministers they are; and that in the secret of their hearts they approach far nearer to the perfection of Christian simplicity and mortification than the world is apt to imagine. How profoundly then does it afflict me, O my God, when I hear blind and perverse men launching their venomous shafts against these and other high dignitaries of Thy Church! - How am I hurt at the irreverent manner in which sometimes, from mere thoughtlessness, persons will speak even before their children of all that is most venerable.

Turning now to the other members of Christ's mystical body, I behold the clergy in their different ranks, and the vast multitude of the laity, between whom and the former, a third estate,

so to say, is presented by the countless religious orders.

And taking into one view the whole body of the Church, I cannot fail to observe that it divides itself into two great classes, the just and sinners; the just, its sound and active members, rich in virtues and good works;—the sinners, its sick members, feeble, languishing, and without energy, but who, nevertheless, as pertaining to the body of the Church, still receive some profitable influences, and have it in their power to enter again by penitence into the plenitude of their life and spiritual functions.

Of all the members which thus constitute the Church, there is not one, let me remember, without a claim on my love, my prayers, my tenderest solicitude. But especially must I show my charity to the Catholics of my own neighbourhood. Never shall my alms be denied to any good work needed in it. My purse may be slender, but it shall always be open to such collections and subscriptions as my pastor has at heart. The building of schools and their efficient support—the sustenance of orphans—the relief of the sick, the aged, and the destitute—the liberal supply of all things necessary to the dignity of the Church offices—the decorations of the sanctuary at festival times—the erection, it may be, of a new church; or the repair, enlargement, beautifying of one already built—the due and honourable maintenance of him who provides for my spiritual necessities, and is set in charge over my soul—all these objects, the last more particu-

larly, without which all the others would be meaningless, shall be ever dear to me, and to advance them shall be the constant aim of my life.

SIXTH MEDITATION.

*To rejoice in all the good effected in the Church,
and thus to make it our own.*

O my God, when I consider what Thy Church has done for me, I grieve to think how slight is the return I can render her. My prayers are so feeble, my influence so small, my circle so confined, that all I can do is nothing in comparison with the desires which, by Thy grace, I feel in me. "The zeal of thine house hath consumed me;"* while at the same time the littleness of any service I can render, affects me with grief. Where shall I find a remedy for this evil?

Thy bountifulness discloses one to me. Although I can do so little for Thy Church, for Thyself, there are others, endowed with greater gifts, who have done and are doing much; and I, by sympathizing, heart and soul, in all their good works, am permitted to do them over again, so to say, in Thy sight, performing in intention all that they have done in reality.

How consoling a reflection! but is it one I

* John ii. 17.

can depend upon? Assuredly it is. For if God is offended at the pleasure we take in the evil done by another, and if he who applauds the licentious life of his neighbour, incurs thereby a similar guilt, before our Witness in Heaven;* it is reasonable to conclude in like manner, that in the sight of Him who takes account of both good and evil, those who delight themselves in the virtues of His children, have already made them their own. The just Judge who seeth the heart, and is far more inclined to reward than to punish, will certainly accept the homage of a soul, which desires to do for her God all that His dearest ones have ever done for Him.

I am aware that there is room here for illusion; that it is very possible to admire what we are far from practising, and to satisfy ourselves with a fiction of the imagination when God asks for deeds. Preserve me, Lord, from such a fatal error. Nevertheless this consideration shall not make a coward of me. Strong in the help of Thy grace, I will review the long line of Christian heroes—I will consider the meritorious works of Thy saints—I will imitate them interiorly—and thus “will I become a partaker with all them that fear Thee, and keep Thy commandments.”†

Oh, with what a generous ardour shall my soul be fired at the spectacle of the white-robed army of Martyrs, as, each with his palm and crown, they pass before my mental vision. Although I have not, like them, resisted unto blood, yet shall

* Job. xvi. 20.

† Ps. cxviii. 63.

my blood seem to flow; and as though it were then and there pouring from my veins, I will offer it Thee in adoring homage. I will hail them in spirit. I will cry out, "Blessed are you that have washed your robes in the blood of the Lamb."* "Rejoice, oh, rejoice, in being partakers of the sufferings of Christ, for that which is of the honour, glory, and power of God resteth upon you.† My heart bears you a holy envy that you have been judged worthy to suffer for our God. A sharer of the same faith which in you overcame the world, I would share also in your triumphs. God was with you and delivered you out of all your tribulations,‡ giving you a strength beyond your own. I, too, doubt not my ability to do, in His strength, all that you have done. My feet are ready to follow in your steps, and if martyrdom shall be wanting to me, never in the preparation of my heart will I be wanting to it." Oh, my God, if such as these be my sentiments, am I not truly blended in one with those who died for the name of Jesus? Shall not their merits be mine also? Am I not already a martyr in Thine eyes?

Then, too, there are the illustrious Confessors, who laboured in their day with such ardour to extend Christ's kingdom upon earth. Certainly I have no ground of comparison with them. Who am I that I should imagine it? Yet, notwithstanding what forbids my associating myself in all their works by acts of interior complacency?

* Apoc. xxii, 14.

† 1 Pet. iv. 14.

‡ Acts vii. 9.

May I not memorialize before God the wondrous achievements, the transcendent virtues, of these His children, even as Solomon of old appealed to the memory of David, his father—"O Lord, remember David and all his meekness;"* or, as the just under the ancient covenant pleaded the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and were heard? May I not put in my claim, even on the score of that exquisite sympathy I feel for them in their loving devotion to Holy Church? Never will I read the life of a saint without repeating to myself continually. "Lord, what he has done for Thee I too would desire to do. That zeal in preaching the Gospel—that endurance through good report and evil report—that courage in combating vice—that persistency, in labouring for the truth and devoting to the Church's service the eloquent tongue and ready pen which Thou gavest him—those profitable discourses so full of sanctity and wisdom—that knowledge abounding like a flood, and his counsels like a fountain of life;†—all these astonishing gifts and graces I make my own, at least in desire; I appropriate them as his fellow-member in Christ; I offer them to Thee as a sweet sacrifice of praise; I plead them before Thee again and again, as a memorial which cannot perish from Thy sight, since it is imperishable even before men."

And then again those heroic penances of the anchorites of old, far away in the depths of the desert—that generous impulse which urged them to quit,

* Ps. cxxxi. 1.

† Ecclesiasticus xxi. 16.

like Abraham, the home of their fathers, at the bidding of their God—that sublime perseverance in mortifying their desires, even the most legitimate, and bearing about in their body the dying of Jesus*—that devotion to holy virginity—that angelic life maintained in a creature of flesh, so feeble, so frail, so natural a friend to corruption—how can I, O my God, contemplate these marvels of sanctity without exulting in that grace which has elevated our poor humanity to such matchless heights? Yes, I exult, I delight, I triumph in the thought; and by this very act of sympathy I trust to gain Thy favour, to please Thee even as they, and to make their merits my own. Like another Jacob I clothe myself in the beautiful garments of these my elder brethren, so carefully treasured up by our holy mother the Church; and look with confidence to receive from my Heavenly Father that benediction also which is theirs, and which they will not grudge me out of their own infinite plenitude.

But, besides those who now enjoy in heaven the reward of their labours, can I forget that God has also His living saints? With these, too, I would desire to associate myself in intention. The contemplation of their zealous efforts for God—of their self-denials—their ardent prayer—their continuance in good works—shall be my perpetual joy. I will exult to think of all they do or suffer in the cause of religion. I will offer it to God in their behalf and my own, as our common treasure in the Communion of saints.

* 2 Cor. iv. 10.

Neither will I be content with this. I will look about in my own more immediate circle for such as shall be like-minded with myself. I will unite myself with them, and under the direction of our common pastor, we will work together in mutual charity. And if there be one bond more than another, that shall hold us together, it shall be love for Holy Church! Yes, Lord, this shall be our motto, our watchword. We will love Thy Holy Church; we will labour for her; we will diffuse far and wide the love of her. We will organize ourselves in her behalf. Thou shalt find in us not only children of the faith, but servants and handmaidens of the Church, breathing nought but love for her, and wholly consecrating their lives to her interests. United together in one same spirit, one same resolve, we will fill up our days, our months, our years, with works profitable to our holy Mother. Morning by morning we will offer Thee, in the sacred chalice, our labours and sufferings of the day, for the good of the Catholic Church. She shall ever have a large share in our communions, our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, our prayers, and thanks-givings. Continually through the day our hearts shall be sending forth short, but ardent ejaculations in her behalf, such as are recommended by the practice of the saints. And all these our deeds, sufferings, prayers, we will place, that they may have better acceptance, in the hands of her, who is herself one of the Church's most beautiful types, the ever-blessed, Immaculate Mary. O my God, bless, console, sustain Thy Church, and increase our love for her from day to day.

Union, it is commonly said, is strength. In our love, then, of Holy Church, we will go still further—we will unite ourselves with all, far and wide, even although utterly unknown to us, whose hearts are enkindled with the same sacred fire. And as it is recorded of Saul in his better days, that “whomsoever he saw to be a valiant man and fit for war, he took him to himself;”* so we, O my God, wherever souls are to be found devoted to Thy Church, (and how innumerable are they!) whether learned or ignorant, in riches or in poverty—will in spirit take them to ourselves, and say to them—“Come with us; let us think of the great mother of our souls; let us interest ourselves in her joys, in her sorrows. Let us contribute all we can towards making her known and loved. God will bless our efforts. God will multiply upon us His graces. And after having laboured for thee, O Holy Church, in our exile here below, we shall one day, as we hope, be welcomed by thee to that heavenly country whither thou hast preceded us, and where, in thy noblest portion, thou awaitest to receive us for ever!”

* 1 Kings xiv. 52

THE END.

PRAYER.

O divine Jesus, who didst say to thy Apostles, "He that heareth you heareth Me;" grant that being docile to the instructions of thy Holy Church, and faithful observers of all her precepts, we may escape the perilous rocks of this present life, and arrive happily at the port of eternal salvation. Amen.

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